



## WHO IS THIS JESUS?

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At this season of the year, we, and most of the inhabited world recognize the birth of one Man, Jesus of Nazareth. Some of us celebrate and worship Him, while others doubt, or scoff. Nevertheless, His name is known around the world.

After He had been in public ministry for a couple of years, and His popularity had been growing, He asked His disciples, *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”* (Matthew 16:13). They answered, *“Some say this prophet, or that prophet.”*

Various answers are still given today: *“A man sent from God.” “A prophet.” “A great teacher.” “A holy man.” “A miracle worker.” “A religious leader.” “The perfect created human.”*

When Jesus inquired further of His followers, *“And who do YOU say that I am?”* (Matthew 16:15), Peter spoke out, *“You are the Messiah (the Christ), the Son of the Living God.”* (Matthew 16:16).

That was, and remains to this day, a unique insight into the nature of Jesus—equating Him with God the Creator, and acknowledging His role as Savior of the world (and especially of the Jewish people).

Jesus replied, *“You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.”* (Matthew 16:17).

We may take away three significant truths from this brief interchange:

1. Jesus was (and is) the Jewish Messiah—the One Anointed by God to redeem His people, and restore them to fellowship with and worship of God. This, Jesus Himself acknowledged, without dispute.

If Jesus was *not* the Messiah, the Jewish people would have been left without a leader, and without a present hope. And if the nation lost all hope, who would reach the rest of the world with the message of the covenant love of God, whom they had been called to represent?

2. Jesus is the Son of the Living God. This is a role and relationship beyond mere human greatness or moral excellence. As it is written in another place: *“The Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God, and He sustains everything by the mighty power of His command. When He had cleansed us from our sins, He sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven.”* (Hebrews 1:3).

He was not created, but was eternally God, and He became a human through the mystery of a virginal conception and an otherwise natural birth. Jesus is the God-Man—Son of God *and* Son of Man. Unique as it was, Jesus accepted this descriptor of Himself. He is Immanuel—God with us.

3. This recognition is the result of divine blessing; it is a gift from God. That blessing includes a revelation, an unveiling of Jesus’ true identity; it is not the result of human instruction or of human reason. If you truly believe that Jesus is the Son of the Living God, it is not because I or anyone else told you so (though we have), but only because the Spirit of God has opened your mind to see it and your heart to believe it. God is in touch with you, and you with Him! Follow that.

Even at the time of Jesus’ birth, before He had preached a sermon or worked a miracle, startling things were spoken of Him. We’ll do well to give our attention again to those words, because familiarity and commercialization can turn them into Christmas card slogans, and erode their meaning and impact.

Here is one example, from three separate passages of Scripture.

Matthew recorded these words, spoken by an angel from Heaven to Joseph, the man engaged to be married to Mary, who was to become the mother of Jesus:

*Matthew 1:18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.*

*<sup>20</sup> As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> And she will have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”*

*<sup>22</sup> All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through His prophet:*

*<sup>23</sup> “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”*

Luke echoed the same, adding some detail:

*Luke 2:8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; <sup>11</sup> for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”*

Eight days later in Jerusalem, when the child was circumcised and given His name, a devout, older man, named Simeon, who lived in the city, was led by the Holy Spirit to encounter the infant and His parents, as recorded by Luke:

*Luke 2:28 Then [Simeon] took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, <sup>29</sup> “Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; <sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen Your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup> a Light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”*

It had always been a global salvation plan, reaching out to the entire human race. Jesus became the linchpin, and His death on the cross, the hinge that linked the First Covenant with the New.

His name, Jesus, means, God saves! And, having been an eyewitness to the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, Matthew could connect this salvation to the ancient prophecy of Isaiah, who called the Messiah “God with us”—for the method of His saving grace was this distinctively intimate identification with humanity as one of us, a God-man, our Immanuel.

Luke’s report confirmed, by the voice of an angel, that He was the Savior and the Lord for all people. This would have been an astonishing stretch of faith for devout Jews, who generally claimed the Messiah for themselves alone—a liberator from Gentile influence and tyranny.

Then Simeon prophetically affirmed the breadth of Jesus’ saving impact as a “Light and Glory” both for the Gentiles *and* for God’s chosen people, Israel.

What has Jesus come to save us from?

Everything that diminishes, defeats, and destroys human flourishing, in relation with God, our fellow humankind, and all that He created.

*“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.” (John 10:10).*

And how will Jesus effect this great salvation?

Most of us readily understand that He died on a cross as a ransom sacrifice to free us from our guilt and sinfulness.

But it's not the method of saving us which was highlighted at His birth; instead, the Scriptures spotlight His elevated position—the authority from which, and by which, Jesus operated.

Many men and women have died for the sake of others, for the sake of their nations, for the sake of freedom. But none of them, save Jesus, had the authority or the power to liberate the entire human race from *“the sin that so easily trips us up”* (Hebrews 12:1).

Please pay attention to this...

Notice how two other passages converge to affirm the exalted position from which Jesus saves the world:

*Luke 1:31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; <sup>33</sup> and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”*

Jesus was born to be a king in the line of David, which both Matthew and Luke technically confirmed by the converging genealogies of Jesus on Mary's side and on Joseph's.

It was not Jews alone who anticipated this. Others were informed and sought to identify Him. Wise men from the east (probably the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, know to us as Iraq—ancient Babylon, where once Jews, including Daniel, were held captive and infiltrated the culture with their stories)—wise men traveled to Jerusalem, when their study of the stars signified the coming birth of the Jewish Messiah.

*Matthew 2:1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”*

From what position does Jesus save us? Not as a martyr, but as a Victor! What was begun on the cross will be completed from the Throne. Jesus triumphs over sin and death, over Satan and Hell. He brings life to its destined fullness.

That is who Jesus is! And that is what Christmas is all about!

It is our privilege to know Him, and to make Him known. If we don't tell those we know, who will?

Most of your Christmas decorating is already done. Most of your Christmas shopping and gift preparation is already done. But this—your opportunity to let Jesus shine—is just ramping up!

Don't miss your opportunity. Pray for guidance, courage, and wisdom.

Perhaps a Christmas morning text or email to friends, family, and co-workers. Let them know (in a VERY FEW words) how special Christmas is for you, and why.

Maybe an offer to pray for them before ending your phone or video call.

How about a brief Scripture reading and prayer before sitting down to a Christmas meal?

Don't leave it to a prepared Christmas card, or a book, or a forwarded image or video. Put it in your own words. Give it your own voice. Make it personal.

That's what Jesus saved you to do. Even when it feels awkward. Even when it's inconvenient.

Be bold! Be strong! For the Lord your God is with you!