

JESUS CHRIST: *God becomes Man*

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 422-658)

A. Who is he?

1. “In the beginning was the Word” – before creation

- *"We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father." (Creed of the Council of Nicaea, composed in 325 A.D., enlarged in 381 A.D.)*

Before Jesus was born or even conceived within his mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, he *was* and existed – indeed he tells us so much himself: *“Before Abraham was, I am.” (Jn. 5:58)* We speak of Christ as pre-existent: when nothing existed outside of God himself, Christ was there – because he is God.

For many, especially today, it appears simply anachronistic to think of the created universe, with all its stars and planets, the matter and energy they contain, as not having existed forever. Some of the most prominent scientists of today have even gone on to state their belief that matter is eternal, has always existed in some form and has never been created and will never cease to be. They are incapable of conceiving that there could be a state of material nothingness when there is simply no physical universe. So, anyway, is the stated opinion of the great Stephen Hawking. Well, leaving aside the unscientific nature of this belief, it is certainly true that many people today are unwilling to accept that the physical universe could have a beginning or end. This is definitely *not* where we come from.

We believe, as Christian people, that the physical universe was not there in the beginning – that there was a time when there was no matter, no energy, and that all we can see, touch, experience and experiment on had to be made – created if you like – by the One who had no beginning. Before there was any created universe, there was simply God. The Jews of the Old Testament believed this, and we have accepted it from them as an authentic insight. The only difference in our beliefs at this stage is to add that for us, as Christian people, when we say “God” we are speaking of all three persons of the Blessed Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God the eternal *SON* of the Almighty Father (he who was born in time of the Virgin Mary and given the human name “Jesus”) was there in the beginning. This is what St. John is stating so definitively at the very start of his Gospel:

- *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” (Jn. 1:1-2)*

It does not end there. God the Son not only pre-exists creation – he is also intimately involved in creation (i.e., he is not a bystander or spectator while God the Father does the creating). St. John continues his prologue to make this point

- *“All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” (Jn. 1:3)*

and this is taken up by the Creed of Nicaea which we proclaim every Sunday:

- *“Through him all things were made.”*

This is critical – we often think of God the Father as the creator and don’t give much thought to Christ or the Holy Spirit. This is reflected in the celebrated case of the Anglican Bishop Barbara, the first woman to rise to this position (in the United States) who began the first service after her installation with the words “In the name of the Creator, the Redeemer and the sanctifier” which in effect reduces creation to the work of the Father. The Sacred Scriptures have a problem with this – God the Son is also creator, as is the Holy Spirit. St. Paul makes this very point – speaking to the Colossians about Christ he writes:

- *“For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - **all things were created through him and for him.**” (Col. 1:16)*

Christ is as much the creator as is the Father. Beyond this, there is a unique relationship between Christ and the created universe: all creation was, in some way, created “for him” – somehow creation comes to a climax in Christ, it is headed towards him and only in him does it reach its fulfilment. In some way, Christ is the key to the whole of creation for without him it would break up and disintegrate:

- *“He is before all things, and **in him all things hold together.**” (Col. 1:17)*

Where is this going? Christ does not come into existence at his conception within his mother, Mary. *We do* – we have no existence before the time that God, by using our parents, gives us both a body and soul at the moment of conception. Christ is different – he is the One God and so has existed throughout all time and before there was time. There was never a moment when Christ, the only Son of the Father, was not.

2. From creation to the year 0 A.D.

- *“He is the radiant light of God's glory & the perfect copy of his nature, sustaining the universe by his powerful command.” (Heb 1:3).*

After the universe was created by the One God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit – co-creators), mankind violated the sacred relationship into which God had entered with him. We don’t know exactly how that was done, but we accept the teaching of Sacred Scripture that the covenant was broken not over the passage of millennia (i.e., that mankind slowly almost imperceptibly drifted into sin) but by a single choice, a conscious decision to reject God – the image given is the taking of the forbidden fruit

in the garden of Eden. The Bible takes up the story from this point, describing the means and events through which God has worked to reveal himself to mankind and to bring him back to the covenant relationship he enjoyed with God in the beginning.

Where is Christ in all this? Remember, he is the “Word” of the Father – the Father’s self-communication. What we believe and are saying is that ALL of God the Father’s actions to show his rebellious children who he is and to instruct them in the Law of Life *are truly the actions of Christ*. That needs a little explanation: when I try to express who I am, I perform actions such as smiling, frowning, laughing, giving a hug etc. I will also speak words – I will speak my opinion and this will reveal how I think and the kind of person I am (judgemental, forgiving, generous, jealous, tolerant, bitter, mean-spirited, honest, selfish, humble etc.). To show who we are, we use signs and symbols (words are just verbal signs) and through these the observer can catch a glimpse of what sort of person lies beneath. God works in the same way, only with greater power. He doesn’t use mere signs and symbols – when he wants to reveal himself, he doesn’t just use words that point to himself and his nature, he uses the WORD (Christ) who IS God and shares his nature. Whenever God speaks, he is actually giving not just information but his own life. When he gives us words, he is communicating THE Word, the very person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Whenever God speaks in the Old Testament, *it is Christ who is speaking* (although the human author who wrote the words down had no idea of this truth because it was not revealed until the time of Jesus’ ministry in Israel) *and Christ who is being communicated*.

This is what St. Paul is getting at when he writes to the Corinthians about Moses and the progress of the people of Israel through the desert having escaped from Egypt. We know from the Old Testament that they were saved from starvation by the miracle of God providing the manna (the bread from heaven) and the quails. He prevented their death from thirst by providing water from the rock that Moses was instructed to strike. BUT – look at how St. Paul looks at these events:

- *“I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, **and the Rock was Christ.**” (1 Cor. 10:1-4)*

Take any apparition, vision and prophetic message in the Old Testament: God the Father is revealing himself through this communication with mankind in order to bring them back slowly into covenant relationship with himself. He reveals himself through the medium of the spoken word which is more than just mere letters strung together to form sentences that impart information: he speaks not words but the Word, Jesus Christ. From the earliest years of the Church’s life, the great Fathers like St. Augustine and St. Basil the Great read the Old Testament and taught that in all these communications from God to man it is Jesus who is speaking:

1. **Noah** (*Gen. 8:21-9:17*). God warns Noah of the impending flood and gives him the opportunity to be saved by instructing him to build the Ark.
2. **Abraham** (*Gen. 15 & 17*). God calls Abraham as an old man to leave his home and family and travel to the land he will be given. God tests Abraham by

calling him to give up his only son, Isaac, in sacrifice on Mt. Moriah (the same place as Mt. Zion, where the Temple was later built, and where Christ was crucified).

3. **Moses** (*Ex. 2:23 - 4:17*). God calls him to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt. On Mt. Sinai he gives Moses the tablets of the Law and through Moses God reveals to Israel that this nation has been chosen to instruct the world once they themselves have learned the ways of God. God speaks directly to Moses, revealing the Law by which Israel would live as God's privileged First-born Son and the eldest of many brothers. The Ten Commandments reveal God's nature, and also how man was created to live: in other words, God guides his people to that way of life which restores their holiness and re-builds the gulf between man and God. God also reveals numerous rites of sacrifice & purity through which the whole nation would be able to cleanse themselves and thus be fit to enter the presence of God), and Israel's social codes (treatment of poor, widow, orphan, stranger, debtor etc.).
4. **David** (*2 Sam 7*). God adopts Israel through her King - "*I will be a father to him & he a son to me.*" (*2 Sam. 7:14*). David is chosen to be the King who will inaugurate the next phase of the covenant, establishing a kingdom based on peace and justice. Throughout David's early years, when he conquered Goliath and then was forced to flee from Saul's envious rage, it was the active protection of God that preserved him.
5. **Malachi** (*1:11*). A great prophesy is made: one day, the work of God will be complete and his people will be thoroughly purified. On that day, they will offer a pure sacrifice to God, one that He will be able to accept. This prefigures the offering of the Mass - a pure sacrifice because it is Christ's gift of his own Body and Blood, and therefore acceptable to God.

All of these revelations, incidents and characters reveal the work of *Christ* even if they all pre-date Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. As the Word of the Father, he was (and is) the way the Father reveals his will to us.

3. "The Word was made flesh" - The Incarnation

- "*For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man.*" (*Creed of Nicaea*)

When Mary gave birth to her Son in the stable in Bethlehem, she brought to the world something utterly unique, the masterstroke of God's plan of salvation. Jesus Christ, the son of Mary is the eternal Son of God the Father born in human history. He is the same one who was there in the beginning, who worked alongside the Father and the Holy Spirit in order to create all that exists. What happened at the Incarnation is that this eternal Son of God the Father has taken human nature and has entered human history in a human way. He is **STILL** God the Son – he is still divine by nature and has not *exchanged* his divine nature for human nature – but he has added human nature to his nature as God: he is the God/man. Jesus Christ, the one who walked

through Israel, healed the sick, raised the dead, calmed storms, fed the 5000, died on the cross and rose from the dead is both FULLY God and FULLY man.

We believe that Jesus Christ had a human mother, Mary, from whom he received his human nature, which is as full and complete as yours or mine. BUT, we believe, in accordance with the teaching of St. Luke, that Christ's father was not St. Joseph, Mary's husband, but God the Father. We uphold the teaching of Sacred Scripture in *the Virgin Birth* and maintain that Christ was born of Mary not as a result of natural human reproduction but by a unique act of God through the power of the Holy Spirit:

- *"The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God"."* (Lk. 1:30-35)

The Incarnation (Jesus Christ being both fully God and fully man) is truly a mystery, like the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. For 700 years the Incarnation was the major issue written about and debated by theologians. There were many attempts to explain how one person could be both God and man at the same time without compromising either, and the raging debate led to many controversies and false teachings:

- In some cases, people stressed Christ's divinity to such a degree that his humanity became rather obscured. Some even said that Christ was not actually human at all but just in human form – he had not taken human nature and so did not feel as we do or experience life as we do (emotions like pain, hunger, happiness, disappointment; experiences like learning, growing, developing friendships), he only pretended to be human. This was a very popular movement in the third century (groups such as the Docetists) and was absolutely rejected by the Church as a false interpretation of the Scriptures: throughout this time the Church continued to maintain that Christ was fully human – *"a man like us in all things but sin"* as the fourth Eucharistic Prayer puts it.
- The other extreme was to stress Christ's humanity to the detriment of his divinity. Some placed such importance on the reality of his human nature that they effectively ignored or even denied that he was (and is) God. The stress was laid on Christ as a holy prophet, a sincere and powerful preacher, a role model of human life and obedience to the Father – a man who was truly, fully and *simply* human. For Christ to grow in size (as infants do), accumulate knowledge, suffer pain or sorrow, die etc. he could not be God because all these experiences imply imperfection and the experience of creatures, not the creator – God can not die any more than a square can have only two sides: it is a contradiction in terms. Thus, since Jesus did do all these things (which show his humanity but are impossible to God), he must be human but cannot be divine. Such was the belief of some, for instance the Arians in the fourth

century. This, too, was resolutely rejected by the Church. The very core of the Gospel and the teachings of St. Paul is that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of the ever-living Father. He is God.

SO, where does that leave us? With a truth, revealed by God himself, that Jesus Christ the co-eternal Word, is born into humanity and from that time on is both fully God and fully man without either compromising the other. The mystery of faith proposes this for our belief in the full knowledge that it is beyond our comprehension.

For us, we need to hold fast to both the humanity and the divinity of Christ. If we lose sight of either one, we are in serious trouble when we come to think of salvation:

1. If Christ is indeed man but is not at the same time also God by nature then Jesus Christ is no different from us. He may have been perfect and avoided every sin but does he have the power to save humanity from their sins? He may be a wonderful role model and example of how we should live, but what about those who have sinned? Could a perfect *man* save them? NO – only God has the power to save. If Christ is not God then he cannot save us and the Gospel is a lie (“*It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven*” – but if he is simply man then the shedding of his blood will *not* bring about the forgiveness of sins). So, if Christ is not God, he is powerless to save us.
2. BUT, if we think of Christ solely as *God*, but overlook his humanity, then we have a new but similar problem. If he is God then Jesus has the power to save – but who has been saved? If Christ has not become man then he has not climbed inside human nature and transformed it from within, restoring its holiness and repairing the damage done by sin. One of the oldest saying of the Church about Christ’s saving work is attributed to the great martyr St. Irenaeus (✠ c. 200 A.D.): “That which is not assumed is not redeemed.” He means that Christ saves by adopting to himself that which is in need of redemption – and by drawing it to himself he heals it and restores it. The consequence is clear – if he has not adopted and assumed human nature then he has not saved human nature. In this scenario, Christ has the power to redeem (because he is God) but he has not actually redeemed, because he has not applied that power to us. If Christ is God but not man then he *can* save but he has not saved *us*.

Like the mystery of the Trinity, the Incarnation is not a puzzle to be solved – it is a wondrous and shattering revelation given by God that shows us the lengths to which he will go in order to get us back. Think of the love it would take for God to adopt human nature: Christianity was rejected in many pagan circles because they considered it shameful and debasing for God to even consider taking the form let alone the actual nature of one of his creatures. God’s beauty and perfection are absolute – and in Christ he laid these down to become weak, ignorant, vulnerable, physical, subject to the laws of nature and the universe, prone to illness, pain, bodily functions, humiliation. The contrast couldn’t be greater. It is more extreme than one of us choosing to become a gerbil or a rabbit just because we loved our pet. For the almighty to debase himself to become a creature – this is love indeed.

Notice the beautiful paradox: we only know about the Trinity because God told us - it is the teaching of Christ. Unless God had come so close to mankind as to share his nature, we would not have grasped just how mysterious and distant from us is the essence of God. In this way, the doctrine of the Trinity balances the doctrine of the Incarnation: the latter is the doctrine that God could come no closer to us than He already has done in Christ – God has become man, one of us. The former, the doctrine of the Trinity, is a reminder that no matter how close God has come, he is essentially different from us - for the simple reason that he is Creator who had no beginning, and we are created and have no possibility of existence without him.

The Incarnation was the real break-through in human history and nothing could ever be the same again. From the time of Adam mankind had been at enmity with God. When God became man we see the beginning of a new order of creation – human nature is brought back into full harmony with God. Now, for the first time in human history, human nature lives within the Godhead. For the rest of time, the family of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) includes within it the human nature of Jesus. There is the ultimate home of humanity – within the family of the Trinity.

4. "He has risen on high to his throne" - From the Resurrection to the end of time

- *"On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end."* (Creed of Nicaea)

We tend to think of Christ in terms of the Gospel stories – walking, talking, healing, etc. We think of the Christ we can picture, especially the most moving moments in his life – his birth in Bethlehem and infancy with Mary, the moment when Mary and Joseph found him in the Temple, the miracle at Cana, the feeding of the 5000, the raising of Lazarus, his Agony in the garden of Gethsemane, his betrayal, arrest, trial, crucifixion and death. These are essential aspects of his life.

BUT, we should remember that while they teach us so much about Christ, the Father and ourselves, ***they do not present Christ as he is today***. Christ as he is today, Christ at this very moment as you read this page is ***not*** limited by his human nature as we are. Christ is not suffering, bleeding, and dying. The Christ we pray to, the Christ of now is *risen, glorified, and transcendent*. He is still human and we must never lose sight of this, but his humanity and human body have been radically transformed and perfected through the miracle of the Resurrection. For all time and beyond, Christ is the victorious, the glorified Son of his Father, filled with glory and divine power – the power that is his as Son and has been given to him by the Father.

What Christ's human nature has become through the resurrection and is forever *we* will become and share in through *our* resurrection. Again, we imperfectly understand – we know that we will have a body of sorts, but also that the risen, glorified body is transfigured by the divine glory we are given, so that, like Christ after the resurrection we will not be limited in the way we are today. The Gospels show us the mysterious nature of the glorified body in the accounts of Christ after the resurrection: he walks into rooms through locked doors, he appears and disappears, he is seen (and spoken

with) by those who know him well but who fail to recognise him, he eats solid food without problem but there is the implication that he has no need to eat. All these show us that the glorified Christ is real, bodily and in a sense physical – but at the same time unfettered by the physical laws of the cosmos and utterly mysterious in nature. At the Ascension, Christ's human nature and body are exalted with the fullness of the divine glory that belongs to the co-eternal Son of God.

Christ since the resurrection is the all-conquering Son, the universal King, the sovereign of all creation. All power and authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him and he reigns supreme, alongside his Father and in the Holy Spirit. He is still fully man as well as fully God – it is just that his human nature is now dignified with the glory of his divine nature. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end – all times belong to him and all seasons. He is both the Lion of the tribe of Judah (an image of his power and glory) and the Good Shepherd (an image of the tenderness of his love).

2. What did Jesus Christ achieve?

That is a big question and I must acknowledge at the outset that I am unable to answer it fully. The short answer is to say that the Gospels explain and contain the core of what Christ achieved. I don't just mean they contain what he said and the visible actions he performed but also the consequences of his actions, the more important of which are not visible or obvious to the human eye. Theology is really the study of what Christ achieved in his human life and is achieving at this very moment through his mystical body, the Church.

SO – how are we to make head or tail of the Gospel and truly penetrate what it reveals to us? That, I am afraid, is a lifetime of prayer and study! The key to the Gospels is the Old Testament. We can go a long way to understanding Christ by referring him to the events and sayings of the Old Testament. What was prophesied in the Old Testament was definitively revealed and fulfilled by Christ. This is what St. Augustine meant and the Second Vatican Council repeated when it quoted him as saying that 'the New Testament is contained in the Old and the Old Testament revealed in the New.'

More than this, the very characters and events of the Old Testament are models, on a human scale, of what Christ achieved on a much greater scale. This is called '*Typology*' – we take events, characters and places from the Old Testament and use them as interpretative keys with which to unlock the events, characters and places referred to in the New Testament and discover their deeper meaning

1. ADAM: the beginning of the human race, he is created in holiness and perfection. All humanity draws its character from him, and in a way, he sets the tone. All subsequent generations have shared in the consequence of his fall from grace – in a way we are all children of Adam. CHRIST – is portrayed as the *new Adam*: as the first-born from the dead he is the beginning of a new creation, the new head and founder of the new humanity. The new Adam is perfect, holy and at one with God. Subsequent generations are given a share in

this new tone of humanity – we become children united to Christ’s risen glorified nature, transferred from Adam’s family to Christ’s. The Church is the new creation, regenerated through Baptism, sharing God’s life, with the grace lost by Adam restored by Christ. BUT – see how the Gospels subtly present this to us by showing how the events of Christ’s life mirror and perfect the events of Adam’s. Adam is created in the Garden. From his side, God creates Adam’s bride, Eve. He works in the garden tilling the soil – a gardener. He eats from one of the two forbidden trees (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). He is expelled from the garden and an angel is posted to stop Adam and Eve returning. NOW, look at Christ. When he is raised to new life after the crucifixion it is in very Adam-like circumstances. John describes his burial not in a cemetery but in a *garden*. When Mary Magdalen sees him she doesn’t recognise him but mistakes him for the gardener. While Adam’s bride, Eve, was created from his side while he slept in the garden, Christ’s bride, the Church, is created from his side while he ‘sleeps’ in death on the cross – this is the meaning of the blood and water that pour from his pierced side (water representing Baptism, by which we enter the Church, and blood representing the Mass, by which we are fully united with Christ within the Church). While Adam ate from the Tree of Good and Evil and survived the experience but ultimately brought death into the human race, Christ metaphorically “eats” from the Tree of Life (the other tree in the Garden of Eden, but also the name given to the cross since the early Church) with exactly the opposite effect from Adam’s experience. Christ dies as a result of eating from the tree, but the longer-term effect is his resurrection to new and glorified life, communicating life to the human race, rather than the death Adam brought to us. What of the angel posted by God to keep Adam and Eve out of the garden? Well, since the death and resurrection of Christ, the gates of heaven have been opened again to mankind – we are able, through Christ, to come back to paradise – so the angel no longer keeps us out: when the women come to the tomb (in the garden) to anoint Christ on Easter Sunday morning they meet the angel. However, far from keeping them out, he welcomes them and guides them as to where they will meet Christ himself. Fanciful? Not really – Christ has re-founded the human race in holiness, overthrowing the decaying wreck of humanity received from Adam. The Gospels present the risen Christ in what can only be described as Adam-language and the meaning is clear: what Adam ought to have been, Christ has fulfilled. What Adam failed to achieve, Christ has restored. Christ is to be understood as the new and perfect Adam. This is not my imagination: it is the teaching of St. Paul – look at *Romans 5:14* (“*Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*”), or *1 Cor. 15:21-22* (“*For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*”).

2. NOAH: the only righteous man God could find in the world. He is called by God to save all who would listen to his voice. He builds the Ark, the boat of salvation, which will carry all those destined to survive to the safety of the home God prepares for them. The Ark is carried on the waters of the flood and comes to rest safely on Mt. Ararat. Christ is viewed in these terms by the Church: He is the only man righteous by his very nature (all others are *made*

righteous by him). He builds the new Ark, the Church – the place of safety for all those who would follow His voice. The new Ark is carried on the waters of Baptism, which make an end of sin and a new beginning of holiness. The Ark of the Church only comes to rest when it reaches the safety of the home prepared for us – heaven. Fanciful? Well, this is the teaching of St. Peter himself – read 1 Pet. 3:18-21 (*“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”*).

3. MOSES: the founder of the nation of Israel, the saviour of God's people who brought them out of slavery in the land of Egypt and led them through the desert to the mountain of God (Mt. Sinai) where he received the Law of the Old Testament and gave it to the people. Moses led and taught the people throughout the 40 years of their wandering in the desert, establishing their rites of sacrifice, the system of government by which the spirit given to him was shared by 70 (or 72) of the *‘elders’* of the people who helped him to apply God's law to the people's cases. Moses was the one whose life was saved in infancy, when the Pharaoh ordered all Jewish male children slaughtered, by his mother floating him in a basket on the Nile. NOW, have a new look at Christ. His life is threatened by the King's edict, too, when he was an infant. He is saved by Mary and Joseph's flight to (surprise, surprise) *Egypt*. As Moses brings the people of Israel out of human slavery, so Christ liberates mankind from slavery to sin. Moses does this through the Passover sacrifice, where a lamb is killed and eaten – Christ, called the “Lamb of God” by John the Baptist, saves mankind by the new Passover which is his own death on the cross and by the faithful receiving the New Passover Lamb (Christ) in the New Passover meal – the Mass. Moses led the people through the waters of the Red Sea into freedom from Pharaoh: Christ leads his disciples through the waters of Baptism into the freedom of holiness. As Moses led the people from the waters of the Red Sea into the desert (where their faith is tested and they are tempted to renounce God) and so to the mountain of Sinai where Moses delivers the Law of God to the people (ten prohibitions which carry the most severe penalties), SO Christ does very similar things – he passes through the waters of the Jordan at his baptism and out into the desert where he is tempted to renounce God, and then back to the people where he delivers the New Law which completes and fulfils the old – not Ten Commandments which carry penalties but eight Beatitudes which carry blessings. Moses gives the people twelve judges (one from each tribe) who assist him in the governance of the vast number of the people. He also appoints teachers who administer God's Law – 70 *elders* who are given a share of his Spirit. Christ uses the Moses model in establishing the New Israel (as St. Paul calls the Church, *Gal 6:16*): he chooses twelve disciples to assist him in his work, making them judges over Israel and giving them thrones of authority (*“Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the*

twelve tribes of Israel” Mt. 19:28). Then, he gives His Holy Spirit to 70 (or 72) other disciples and sends them out to teach and administer the New Law (Lk. 10:1). As Moses wrote the first five Books of the Bible, the Torah or Law so St. Matthew gathers Christ’s teachings into five great sections, just to underline the point. This is not all, but it shows how a knowledge of Moses’ life sheds light on what Christ was doing: as Moses founded God’s chosen people and led them from slavery into freedom, so Christ establishes the New Israel built on the New Law, and leads all who would follow him out of bondage to sin and into the freedom of the children of God.

4. KING DAVID: the boy chosen by God to succeed Saul as King of Israel and Judah. David is the anointed one (in Greek, ‘*Christos*’, in Hebrew ‘*Messiah*’) who establishes the Kingdom of Israel as a growing empire. For the first time in history, the Law of God is brought to the ears of pagan peoples (non-Jews: those who were conquered by David’s armies). David makes his capital in Jerusalem and places the Ark there in the Tent he pitches for it. David’s Kingdom becomes a by-word for prosperity. He is known as the just King, reigning with wisdom and mercy. The covenant made with David established his dynasty forever, an unending kingdom of peace and justice. SO, what of Christ? First, he is descended from David in the male line and so inherits the title “Son of David” – through Christ the promise of an unending kingdom of justice and peace is fulfilled, for his kingdom, although “not of this world” is more real and lasting than any earthly empire. As David chose Jerusalem as his capital, so Christ, the ‘Son of David’ comes in royal triumph into his capital (Palm Sunday). Note that Jerusalem became a synonym for heaven in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, this is continued – the city of David is a ‘Type’ of heaven in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 21:1-2)

So, what do we learn from this? These Old Testament ‘types’ fill in the blanks for us. Christ is in the role of Adam in that he re-founds the human race, only this time in holiness and communion with the Father. He is in the role of Noah as the one who saves through the founding of the Church, the Ark of Salvation. He is in the role of Moses as the founder of the Church, the People of God – the one who mediates with the Father and brings us the New Law, leading us from slavery into freedom. He is in the role of David – establishing a kingdom that will never pass away, a kingdom of holiness and peace, of justice, life and integrity.

There is more – Christ is called the ***Lamb of God***: he is in the role of the Passover Lamb whose life is taken so that the people of Israel may be saved from Pharaoh. The lamb is killed and eaten by the people, thus bringing them out of danger and beginning their path to freedom (does this make you think of the Mass?).

He is called the “***image of the invisible God***” (Col. 1:15) – more than just a picture for the satisfaction of our eyes, Christ is the making-present of the fullness of the Godhead so that to have seen Christ IS to have seen the Father (Jn. 14:9) “*for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*” (Col. 1:19).

Christ is called the ***Alpha and the Omega*** first and last letters of the Greek alphabet: he is the beginning and the end of all that is – he is co-creator with the Father and the Holy Spirit and so the origin from which all existence came. He is also the *omega* –

the point of completion and fulfilment towards which all creation tends. In Christ all things hold together – he has redeemed the whole of creation through his death and resurrection, and creation will come to its ultimate fulfilment when it is fully united to him.

Christ is the *divine bridegroom*: this title refers to his relationship with the Church, a relationship that bears closest resemblance to that of a husband with his bride. Christ is more than our teacher and friend – he takes the Church to himself in the most intimate way possible and shares his very life with her, making her fruitful as the mother of all who are given new life. The Church becomes his bride, esp. in the book of Revelation, when she is finally made spotless and ready for the wedding.

Christ is called *the Good Shepherd*, a title that indicates his absolute commitment to his flock (that's us!). While the hired shepherd puts his own safety above that of the sheep, the Good Shepherd lays his life on the line to defend them. It also indicates his role as teacher and head of the Church – the shepherd trains his flock and leads them, instructing them in all they need to know.

He is called *the door*: he is the only route there is to the Father. No one else can lead us to God except the one who has access to God – and that is Christ. Without him, there is no hope for mankind. Through him there is only one future for mankind – paradise.

Christ is *the resurrection and the life*: he is the giver of all life – human and divine. He gave us this passing, human, mortal life at the moment of our conception. More than that, he gives us supernatural life through the sacrament of baptism by filling us with his Holy Spirit and so uniting us with himself and sharing his own life with us. This is his glorified, transcendent, resurrected life which we already share through Baptism and which is brought to fulfilment when we share Christ's victory over sin and death on the day of our own resurrection, when Christ will raise us to himself and complete the gifts he has given to us in the Church.

He is *the vine*: just as life flows from the trunk of the vine through to the extending branches, so too we are filled with eternal life while we stay connected to Christ. We have no life within us other than the life Christ brings. Separation from Christ is as terminal for us as separation from the vine is terminal to the branches. Flowing through each branch is the life-blood of the vine itself.

This list could go on forever. Suffice it to say that in these titles of Christ lie the thinking of the Church regarding the person and the significance of Christ. As Christian people, we cannot overstate our reliance on him, for Christ is the only true way to the Father and the Holy Spirit, and in this lies our salvation. We are absolutely *Christocentric* – centred on him – but we are not *Christomonist* – solely focussed on Christ, for the core of our faith is belief in all three persons of the Godhead: God the Father, his co-eternal Son Jesus Christ, and the Spirit that binds them together in love.

3. Christ: the fullness of revelation of human nature

Christ is fully man as well as fully God: it follows that in Christ is revealed the very heart of the Godhead & the perfect example of human nature. Christ became man many reasons, but one of these was to reveal human nature in its perfection, & how men should act if they are to live in conformity with the plan of God & with their own human nature, which is imaged on the nature of God.

In other words, Christ is not simply the answer to the question "what is God like?" but also to the question "what is man like & called to be?" We believe that in his humanity, Christ fulfilled the commandment of the Law to perfection (of course, if he didn't then he would be imperfect and thus not God!). Each of the Commandments he completed and lived out with such perfection that in him, they achieve all they were designed to achieve. Christ is the new Adam - he lives in relationship with the Father and with his brothers and sisters as the first Adam should have done, honouring them no less than himself, loving the Father with all his heart, mind, soul and strength; loving his neighbour as himself. Christ is the model of the new humanity. When Ezekiel prophesied that Israel needed a new heart, that Israel's heart was like stone, inflexible, brutally hard, intolerant and unaccustomed to giving love, he was prophesying the total transformation of humanity. Man would be incapable of living according to the household law of the family of God (the Covenant law) until he realised that he needed a new heart from God. Once man realised it and desired it, God would grant it. Christ is the key for us to fulfilling the potential of human nature - humanity as it could be and ought to be is lived out by Christ. This has some shattering consequences:

1. Suffering - Christ suffered continuously throughout his life. This is not because he is purifying himself from sin (as he is sinless). Suffering as accepted by Christ is raised to an act of love. Finally, it is of course the great act of redemption. Unlike the world, especially today, which sees suffering as an avoidable by-product of living (and will expend considerable resources to help you side-step wherever possible). Christ, on the other hand, while not courting suffering as a masochist would, offers it without hesitation not for his own benefit but for ours. This is the root of the concept of redemptive sacrifice. Christ shows that human suffering, when accepted in filial love, is salvific. Man is called to sacrifice himself and therefore that it is the path to holiness - *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness - they shall be satisfied ... Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."* (Mt. 5:6,10)
2. The Commandments - these are summarised in the Law of Love: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* (Jn. 14:15) - *"All the Commandments: You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."* (Rom. 13:9-10) In other words, when Christ was obeying and fulfilling the Commandments perfectly, he was loving at its deepest level. Christ's human life of perfection speaks volumes: we often think that the gentleness of love can conflict with the rigidity of the Commandments, but Christ's life tells a different story. The Commandments are love-in-action, a description of the most basic characteristics of true love. If we break the commandments, under the impression that we are obliged to

do so in order to be loving in a Christ-like way, then we can be certain that we are failing to love: love does not impel us to do unloving actions.

3. Forgiveness - all would agree that we need forgiveness from God for our sins. However, while God's love is unconditional (he loves us no matter what we do to him), God's mercy is not: God's mercy is conditional on our offering forgiveness. Christ's words of forgiveness and compassion from the cross "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*" (Lk. 23:34) are normative and essential. The only way to qualify for the Father's mercy is to offer mercy and pardon to our persecutors - "*do not condemn and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon and you will be pardoned.*" (Lk. 6:37) If we fail to forgive, we will be unable to benefit from the Father's forgiveness: only the merciful are told they will receive mercy (Mt. 5:7) "*When you stand and pray, forgive anything that someone may have done to you, so that your Father in heaven will forgive the wrongs you have done.*" (Mk 11:25) "*For if you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done.*" (Mt. 6:14-15)

"The Word became flesh to be our model of holiness: 'Take my yoke upon you & learn from me.' 'I am the way, the truth & the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.' On the mountain of the Transfiguration, the Father commands 'Listen to Him!' Jesus is the model for the Beatitudes & the norm of the new law: 'Love one another as I have loved you'." (C.C.C. 459)