

# **Lenten Luncheon Reflections 2009**

**Tuesday, March 24, 2009**

## **Jesus as Messiah**

### **Prayer:**

Gracious God, as we gather here this day we give you thanks for all that it means to us to call Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, your Anointed One. We praise you for giving him in love to us and to the whole world. We thank you for his faithfulness in doing your work and will even though it meant suffering, rejection and even the cruel death of the cross. As we have seen your love in him we praise you for all that it means to us to claim that love in our lives this day and every day. Accept the gratitude of grateful hearts as we offer to you our thanks also for this food and the fellowship that we are sharing around these tables this day, for we ask all of these things in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Last Sunday here in this congregation we may have surprised some people as we reflected together on Jesus as the Messiah or the Christ to have sung the Christmas Carol, "O Come, all ye faithful," as our opening hymn. Today I would like us to continue that theme as we sing another Christmas Carol, "Angels, from the Realms of Glory." We will sing stanzas 1 and 4.

I would like to invite you to think today what comes easiest to your thoughts or to your lips as you pray to say, "Jesus Christ," or to say, "Jesus the Christ." I do not know about you, but I must admit that for me, "Jesus Christ," certainly is much more of the way in which I tend to speak than to say, "Jesus the Christ." In fact last Sunday as I used the words, "Jesus the Christ," in our prayers following the

sermon I found that I really had to think exactly what it was saying. For most of us I think that the name Jesus Christ is used so often as if Christ was the family name or part of the personal name of Jesus. Christ, though, is not his name but rather his title. Christ is the Greek form of the Hebrew word which we translate as Messiah. To call Jesus Christ then is really to say that Jesus is the Messiah.

In the words we sang together we saw how both the words or titles, Messiah and Christ, have carried over into the English language. The carol spoke of the angels proclaiming Messiah's birth, and also invited us to come and worship Christ, the newborn king. The carol, of course, reminds us of the familiar words that we read in Luke's Gospel of the angels visit to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus. In the New Revised Standard Version we read in Luke 2:10-11: "Do not be afraid; for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." Many of us are more familiar with these words in some older translations, including the King James Version, where instead of Messiah the word Christ is used. The meaning, of course, is the same. Messiah is the Hebrew and Christ the Greek translation, both of which literally mean "Anointed One."

The term or title, "Messiah" does not appear anywhere in the Old Testament. The words "anoint," "anointed" or "anointing" appear in 141 verses. The ritual of anointing involves rubbing oil on the body or some other object to set it apart for holy purposes, or the pouring of oil over the anointed one's head. One of the first references to such ritual is found in Genesis 28. This is the story with which most of us are probably familiar for singing the song, "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder." Jacob is fleeing from his brother Esau after he had stolen the blessing of his father intended for his brother. When he had come to a certain place we read he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head and lay down to sleep. As he slept he has a dream in which he is assured of God's presence with

him as he sees that ladder set up on earth and the top reaching to heaven and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. When he awakes he says, “Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it. In morning we read he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it, and he called the name of the place, Bethel,” which means, “house of God.” (Genesis 28:10-18)

In Exodus 40 we read that the tabernacle and its furnishing were anointed with oil by Moses. In the same chapter Moses is also told to anoint Aaron and his sons as priests of Israel. In later history, Elisha is also anointed as a prophet by the prophet Elijah. The first kings of Israel, Saul and David, as well as those who followed them were anointed to office, rather than being crowned. According to rabbinic tradition, oil (olive oil mixed with spices like cinnamon, calamus and myrrh) was poured on the heads of the kings in a circle to form a crown. Their anointing signified the king’s right to rule. It meant that God had blessed him with authority, strength and honor. When Samuel anointed David as king, it is said that David was also given the spirit of the Lord. In time oil also became a symbol for the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit. (*Praying the Names of Jesus* by Anne Spangler. Zondervan, 2006, page 121) There is no record that Jesus was anointed with oil but certainly at his baptism there is that anointing with the Holy Spirit and God’s affirmation, “This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well-pleased.” The fact that Jesus is seen as the Anointed One means that traditionally he is seen as fulfilling the three roles of those who were anointed in the Old Testament, the priest, the prophet and the king. The traditional Shorter Catechism as well as the new Study Catechism in the Presbyterian Church both have questions which ask about how Jesus fulfilled these three offices of prophet, priest and king.

Although the word Messiah does not appear in the Old Testament there are several passages that refer directly or allude to the hope of One who would be the

Deliverer, the Savior, whom God would send. These are some of the prophetic passages that we read during the Advent Season. These are also some of the passages that Handel has made so familiar in his great oratorio, "The Messiah." The association of so many of these passages with King David meant that people came to look for the Messiah to come from the house of David and by implication to be someone who like King David would bring their nation military and political victory. We will see more this association with David next Sunday and in our reflections next Tuesday, as well as in our closing hymn this morning.

The angels' message at the birth of Jesus that they are bringing good news of a great joy for all the people begins to point in the direction of the fact that Jesus was not coming as the Messiah, God's Anointed, just for the people of Israel, but for all people. No doubt it was this broader concept that prompted Jesus not to be so anxious to claim the title of Messiah. In Matthew's version of the story we heard last Sunday from Mark 8 we see this taking place. (Matthew 16:13-16, 20-23):

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" [14] And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." [15] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" [16] Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." [20] Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. [21] From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. [22] And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." [23] But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me,

Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

We note here two significant things first of all that after Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah there is the order to tell no one that he is the Messiah. This may well have been because of what the term Messiah had come to mean to so many people. The second is the way in which he seems to give a new picture of what it will mean for him to be the Messiah as he talks of suffering, of rejection and of being killed.

Although Jesus ordered his disciples to be silent about his being the Messiah we find at that his trial before the Jewish authorities the question of his identity becomes a significant one. According to Mark (Mark 14:61-65)

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" [62] Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'" [63] Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? [64] You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. [65] Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

Although Matthew and Luke are not quite as emphatic about his answer in all three Gospels the chief priest and all his accusers hear his answer to be that in which he affirms that he is the Messiah. For them, of course, this is seen as blasphemy, a claiming to be what in their eyes he could not possibly be. As he dies on the cross they taunted him by saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now so that we may see and believe." (Mark 15:32) For them the fact that he did not come down from the cross was proof positive that he could not possibly be the Messiah.

In this respect, of course, Peter's thinking was exactly in line with theirs as he first rebuked Jesus as he began to talk about having to suffer, to be rejected and to be killed. What a difference, though, we see ultimately in Peter's thinking and theirs. Just over six weeks after the death of Jesus on the cross we hear Peter preaching on the Day of Pentecost right there in Jerusalem on the home turf of the chief priests and the scribes and saying, "Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36)

The one who was seen as the agent of Satan as he rejected any concept that the Messiah would have to suffer, to be rejected and to be killed has now become the primary one to affirm that as he has suffered, as he has been rejected, as he has been killed, and most of all, as he has been raised from the dead, God has shown that Jesus is indeed the Lord and Messiah, and that even in suffering and in death he had been fulfilling the purpose for which he had come into the world.

For us, of course, like Peter, there is no way in which we can claim that Jesus is the Messiah without seeing him as the One who suffers, is rejected and is killed, but whom God raised from the dead thus affirming that all that he said and all that he did was indeed God's will and the way in which God had sought to show to his world how much he loves and cares for us and wants us to know a loving and wholesome relationship with him.

Before you feel that I was trying to lay a guilt trip on you as I began these reflections for using the name, Jesus Christ, rather than the title, Jesus the Christ, let me assure you that Jesus Christ rather than Jesus the Christ is a very common way in which Jesus is addressed after his resurrection as the Early Church began to proclaim all that he had done. As early as the Day of Pentecost we find Peter inviting people to "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus

Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

By Acts 11:26 we read that it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called, “Christians.” Such a title may have been one of contempt but it at least indicates that the members of the church there were clearly being associated more with the name Christ than that the name Jesus. It is, of course, this designation from the Early Church that has stuck with us still today as we would still call ourselves Christians, the followers of Christ, or the followers of Jesus Christ rather than just the followers of Jesus.

It is Paul, of course, in his writings who makes the most use of Christ, using it as a common title or even a proper name for Jesus, far more often that he uses the name Jesus alone. Sometimes Paul says, “Jesus Christ,” or sometimes he changes the order to read, “Christ Jesus” or gives the full title “the Lord Jesus Christ.” Frequently, though, he simply says, “Christ.” Writing to the Christians in Corinth he does not say, “we proclaim Jesus crucified” but rather he says, “we proclaim Christ crucified.” (I Corinthians 1:23a) We see then that as we speak of Jesus Christ rather than of Jesus the Christ we are following what became an early way in which this title became used as a name in the Early Church.

Paul, of course, would say that whether we speak of Jesus the Christ or of Jesus Christ does not really matter. What matters is that we know a living, loving relationship with this One whom God sent as his Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. Today I would like to invite you to think about what this relationship means to you using the words based on those from I Peter 2:9-10. These were probably words of affirmation spoken to new Christians immediately following their baptisms. Like Jesus, and like us, they may not have been anointed with oil, but they too like Jesus, and like us, had received the gift of the Holy Spirit at their baptisms. Before we make this affirmation of faith as also our closing prayer

we will think about our relationship with Jesus, the Lord's Anointed, using the hymn of James Montgomery, who wrote our opening hymn today. This hymn is a paraphrase of Psalm 72. We will sing stanzas 1 and 2 of his hymn, "Hail to the Lord's Anointed."

**Affirmation of Faith based on 1 Peter 2:9-10:**

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that we may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once we were not a people, but now we are God's people; once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. All of this has happened because God had given us the gift of God's Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. Thanks be to God for God's amazing gift to us. Amen.