

# Lenten Luncheon Reflections 2009

Tuesday, March 31, 2009

## Jesus as Son of David, Son of Man and Son of God

### **Litany of the Names and Titles of Jesus:**

Leader: Come, let us give thanks to God for the gift of Jesus,

**People: and let us rejoice in wonder and amazement at God's gift to us.**

Leader: To Joseph the angel announced that the child, Jesus, to be born to Mary would be called, "Emmanuel, which means, "God with us."

**People: For the Gospel writer John Jesus is the Word of God, the very essence of the Deity, present and active from before creation's first light,**

Leader: It is this Word, John says, who has become flesh in Jesus and has come to dwell among us,

**People: so that in Jesus we have seen the glory of the Father's only son, full of grace and truth.**

Leader: The disciples addressed Jesus as Rabbi, Teacher, Master, and claimed him as the One who spoke the words of life.

**People: John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.**

Leader: Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man who would suffer, be rejected, be killed, and on the third day be raised from the dead.

**People: As Jesus entered Jerusalem the crowd shouted out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"**

Leader: Blessed Is the One Who Comes in the Name of Lord!"

**People: As he watched Jesus die the cruel death of the cross the Roman centurion exclaimed, "Truly this man was God's Son."**

Leader: In the Book of Revelation John speaks of the Risen Jesus as the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings.

**People: An early hymn of the church said of him, “God has highly exalted him and given him a name above every other name,**

Leader: So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven, and on earth and under the earth,

**People: and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”**

Leader: For your marvelous and amazing gift to us of Jesus,

**Unison: We give you praise and thanks, O God.**

Leader: For wisdom and guidance to grow in our appreciation of all that your gift of Jesus means to us,

**Unison: we seek your help, O God, in the wonderful name of Jesus. Amen.**

As we draw closer to the end of Lent next Sunday we will celebrate Palm Sunday and the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. It is as he enters Jerusalem that people cry out, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! One of our Palm Sunday hymns reminds us of the welcome given to Jesus by the crowd as he entered Jerusalem. Today we will sing stanzas 1 and 2 of “With Our Glad Hosannas.”

When I was a student in the University College of Cardiff in South Wales my Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages for my first two years there was also a Baptist minister. Frequently he would say, “We, Baptists, know that you cannot understand the New Testament without understanding the Old Testament. Unfortunately, for some of us we get so engrossed in the Old Testament that we never get to the New!” Whether or not like Dr. Aubrey Johnson we become so engrossed in the Old Testament that we do not get to the New Testament his words are certainly true that it is hard to understand the New Testament without the Old. The opening words of the New Testament in Matthew’s Gospel highlight this truth when they say, “An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matthew 1:1) Just towards the end of the last chapter of the Book of Revelation as part of the conclusion

of the book we read, “It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendent of David, the bright morning star.” (Revelation 22:16) Matthew, Mark and Luke, identify Jesus by this name, Son of David, seventeen times. The association of David with the hope for a Messiah, a Deliverer, God’s Anointed One goes back to the promise of God to David which is often called the Davidic Covenant in II Samuel 7. After David was established on the throne of Israel he longed to build a dwelling place for God, a house of worship to replace the tattered tabernacle. But as he laid plans for the temple, God sent him a message through the prophet, Nathan: “When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.. and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.. and your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever. (II Samuel 7:12-13, 16). It was from this promise of God that the people of Israel looked with hope to that One whom God would send as the Messiah, from the house and lineage of David. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the City of David, and his connection to David through Joseph are seen as two of the ways in which this hope was fulfilled. As he enters Jerusalem humbly on a donkey rather than as military leader like King David Jesus highlights the way in which what it meant for him to be the Son of David must be seen in ways that were different from what many expected of the Messiah. As we saw last week that was a major factor in why people rejected Jesus rather than accepting him as the Son of David. For us, though, the very title, Son of David, being given to Jesus reminds us of the hope that is ours because of God’s faithfulness to God’s promises even, though, those promises may not always be fulfilled in the way in which people might have hoped or expected. They are fulfilled by the One who comes in the name of the Lord, and who far more than David, comes to show us God’s ways.

Part of the uniqueness of the way in which God chooses to show us God’s ways is seen in the way in which Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man. This is a unique way in which Jesus chose to refer to himself over eighty times in his ministry. No one ever addresses Jesus in this way, and such a title does not appear in any of the confessions or hymns scattered throughout the New Testament, and neither Paul nor any other New Testament writer refers to Jesus in this way. The title is derived from the Hebrew and can mean simply, “human being.” In the Book of Psalms and in the Book of the prophet Ezekiel and in part in the Book of Daniel the title, “son of

man,” is used in this way. Against this background, of course, the use by Jesus of the title, son of man, emphasized the fact that he came truly to share our human flesh and to dwell among us. This is the mystery of the Incarnation that God would choose to come and to share life with us in this world in human form. It is truly as the son of man that Jesus comes not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

The other reference to the Son of Man in the Old Testament comes in the Book of Daniel. In chapter 7:9-10 Daniel speaks of his vision of the four beasts that represent the four world empires that threaten the people of Israel, the Babylonian, the Medes, the Persians and the Greeks. In his vision these great empires will be defeated by one like a son of man coming down with the clouds of heaven. Of this one like the son of man it is said, “To him was given dominion and glory and kingship that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away and his kingship is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:14) In these words, of course, we hear words that later were to be used in the Book of Revelation of Jesus himself. Many of his contemporaries refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah because he failed to fulfill their expectations of him as the Son of David who would destroy the power of Rome, but those who have come to accept him look to that time when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. It is a picture of what that kingdom would be like that Jesus seeks to give us a glimpse as he speaks to us of the humble, sacrificial ways of service of the Son of Man. In this way Jesus seems to be combining in the title Son of Man the picture given in Isaiah 53 of the Suffering Servant of God. To speak of Jesus as the Son of Man confronts us not just with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God becoming flesh in Jesus, but also with the mystery of the way in which the Almighty, the All-Powerful God would seek to show God’s ways to this world in humble service, in rejection and even the cruel death of a cross.

What Jesus makes clear, though, is that the title he uses of Son of Man cannot be separated from the title, Son of God. Never does he claim to speak on his own authority for what he says and what he does. Although there are only 21 verses in the Gospels in which reference is made to Jesus as the Son of God, as compared with 78 where there is reference to him as the Son of Man it is clear that who he is cannot be understood without holding both of these titles in tension. In his announcement of the coming of Jesus to Mary the angel Gabriel combines the

connection with David and his kingdom with Jesus being the Son of God when he says, (Luke 1:31-35): And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. [32] 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 ancestor David. [33] He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." [34] Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" [35] 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 holy; he will be called Son of God."

John in his Gospel lacks the beautiful Christmas stories found in Matthew and Luke yet affirms the same truth when he says, (John 1:14, 15-18): And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. [16] From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [17] The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

At his baptism we see this truth being affirmed, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). The same is true at the Transfiguration when Peter, James and John hear, "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him." (Mark 9:7)

In Chapter 5 of his Gospel John makes clear that what begins with the Jewish leaders condemning Jesus for healing a lame man on the Sabbath leads to something far deeper. (John 5:15-21): The man whom Jesus had healed went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. [16] Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. [17] But Jesus answered them, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." [18] For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God. [19] Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. [20] The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. [21] Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes."

These words highlight again that the real wonder of all that God has done for us in Jesus comes as we see that we need to hold in tension the titles of Son of David, of Son of Man and of Son of God. This is a tension that the Christian Church has recognized and affirmed down through the centuries in one of the earliest Creeds of the Church, the Nicene Creed, which is still a foundational creed for all Christians. The teaching of that creed has also been reflected in much of our Christian poetry and our Christian hymns. The hymn, “Fairest Lord Jesus” comes out of the Jesuit tradition of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany in the seventeenth century but is used by Christians throughout the world still today to give praise and glory to Jesus. Before we sing stanzas 1 and 4 of this hymn as our concluding prayer of adoration and praise, we will affirm our faith using the portion of the Nicene Creed which speaks about Jesus.

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; through him all things were made. For us, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures, he ascended into heaven and is seated on the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.