

The Lord Jesus Christ

The Savior of the World

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“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The Incarnate and only begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the Savior of mankind. Through the will of God the Father and out of pity for us sinful people, He came into our world and became man. By His word and example He taught us how to believe and live to become righteous and worthy to be called God's children and take part in His immortal and glorious life. To free us from our sins and to defeat death, He died on the cross and arose on the third day.

Now, as God-man, Jesus Christ resides in Heaven with His Father. He is the head of God's Kingdom established by Him, which is called the **Church**, wherein believers save themselves, led and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Before the end of the world, Jesus Christ will return anew to the earth to judge both the dead and the living. After that will come His Kingdom of Glory, wherein the saved will ever rejoice in paradise. Such is the prophecy, and we believe it will come true.

Expectation of the Advent of the Messiah

The greatest occurrence in the life of mankind was the coming of the Son of God onto the earth. For that event, God had been preparing mankind, especially the Jewish nation, over the course of many thousands of years. From among the Jewish people God brought forth prophets who predicted the advent of the world's Savior — Messiah — and by this laid a foundation of belief in Him. By the same token, during many generations, beginning with Noah, then with Abraham, David, and other righteous men, God had been clearing the way for that corporeal vessel from which the Messiah had to receive His human nature. Thus, finally, the Virgin Mary was born and proved to be worthy to become the Mother of Jesus Christ.

Simultaneously God directed political events of the ancient world so that the advent of the Messiah would be successful and His blessed Kingdom would spread widely among the nations. Thus, up to the Messiah's advent many pagan nations became annexed by the Roman Empire. This circumstance gave the preachers of the Gospel the ability to travel freely throughout the widespread countries of the Roman Empire. The commonly used Greek language helped the Christian communities, scattered at great distances, to remain in touch with one another. The Gospels and the Apostles' epistles, written in Greek, were understood by everyone.

Because of the cultural closeness of the nations and the spreading of science and philosophy, belief in pagan gods was strongly challenged. People began thirsting for satisfactory answers to their religious questions. Thinking people in the pagan world were aware that their society was

coming to a dead end, so they began to express hope in the coming of the Reformer and Savior of mankind.

The earthy life of Our Lord Jesus Christ

For the Messiah to be born, God chose the chaste Virgin Mary, who was descended from the family of King David. Mary was an orphan and was in the custody of Her distant relative, the older Joseph, who lived in Nazareth, a small town in the northern part of the Holy Land. The Angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary and proclaimed to Her that She had been chosen to become the Mother of the Son of God. When the Virgin Mary humbly agreed, the Holy Spirit descended upon Her, and She conceived the Son of God. Nine months after that followed the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, the town in which King David, His ancestor, was also born. (Historians refer to the time of the birth of Jesus Christ as the years between 749 and 754 from the foundation of the city of Rome.) The accepted chronology AD (Anno Domini) begins from the year 754, from the foundation of Rome.

The Life, miracles, and conversations of the Lord Jesus Christ are described in the four books called the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the first three Evangelists, describe the events of His life, which happened for the most part in Galilee, the northern portion of the Holy Land. The Evangelist John adds to their narrations descriptions of the events and conversations of Christ that happened in Jerusalem and its vicinity.

Up to thirty years of age, Jesus Christ lived with His Mother, the Virgin Mary, in Joseph's house in Nazareth. At the age of 12 He went with His parents to Jerusalem for Passover and spent three days in the temple conversing with scribes. Other details of the Savior's life during this early period are little known except for the fact that He helped Joseph with carpentry. As man, Jesus Christ grew and developed in a natural way, as all people do.

In His 30th year, Jesus Christ accepted baptism from the prophet John in the river Jordan. After that, to prepare for His public ministry, He set out for the desert and fasted for forty days. It was during this time that He was tempted by Satan.

Jesus began His public ministry in Galilee by selecting 12 Apostles. His miracle at the marriage ceremony at Cana, in Galilee, strengthened the faith of His disciples. After spending some time in Capernaum, Jesus Christ set out for Jerusalem for Passover. There, for the first time, He aroused against Himself animosity of the Judaic chieftains, especially of the Pharisees, by driving away merchants from the temple. After Passover, Jesus Christ called His Apostles, gave them the necessary instructions, and sent them to preach the coming of God's Kingdom. He also traveled throughout the Holy Land, preaching, gathering disciples, and spreading the word about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ showed His Godly appointment through numerous **miracles and prophecies**. Nature obeyed Him unconditionally. In this way, for example, a storm was stopped by His command; He walked on the water as on the land; He multiplied five loaves and several fish to feed the multitudes; and He once transformed water into wine. He resurrected the dead, drove off de

mons, and cured the sick. While doing this, Jesus Christ never performed miracles for himself or to impress the people with his divine power. All His miracles are permeated with a **deep compassion** for the oppressed, the weak and the suffering.

The greatest miracle of the Savior was His own **resurrection** from the dead. Through His resurrection He defeated the power of death over mankind and laid a foundation for our resurrection from the dead that will happen at the end of the world.

The Evangelists recorded many **prophecies** told by Jesus Christ, some of which already came true during the lifetime of the Apostles and their successors. These include prophecies about Peter's denial and the treachery of Judas, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, the miracles to be performed by the Apostles, the persecution of Christians, the destruction of Jerusalem, and others. Some of the prophecies regarding the last days, such as the spreading of the Gospel throughout the world, the general moral degradation of the final days, the cooling of the faith, horrible wars and earthquakes, are beginning to be fulfilled. Finally, prophecies regarding the universal resurrection of the dead, the second coming of Christ, the end of the world, and the great day of judgment are yet to come true.

Through His power over nature and His knowledge of the future, the Lord Jesus Christ witnesses to the verity of His teachings and of the fact that He is truly the only begotten **Son of God**, who came to this world to save us from sin and death.

The public ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ lasted for more than three years. The high priests, scribes, and Pharisees did not accept His teaching. Envy of His miracles and success, they plotted and schemed to kill Him. At last such an occasion presented itself.

After the Savior had resurrected Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, Jesus Christ, six days prior to Passover, surrounded by a multitude, triumphantly, like the son of David and the king of the Israelites, came into Jerusalem. People offered Him royal honors. Jesus Christ worked His way right up to the temple, but, seeing that the high priests had turned the house of prayer into “a den of thieves,” He expelled all the merchants and money changers. This evoked the anger of the Pharisees and high priests, and at their assembly, they plotted His demise. At this time Jesus Christ continued during several days to teach the people in the temple. On Wednesday one of His twelve disciples, Judas Iscariot, offered to betray his Teacher to the Sanhedrin for thirty pieces of silver. The high priests gladly agreed.

On **Thursday**, Jesus Christ, wishing to celebrate Passover with His disciples for the last time, went from Bethany to Jerusalem where His disciples Peter and John had prepared a large room for Him. Having arrived there in the evening, Jesus showed His disciples the greatest example of humility by washing their feet, an act usually done by servants. Then Jesus celebrated with His disciples the Passover of the Old Testament. After supper He established the Passover of the New Testament — the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, or **Holy Communion**. Having taken the bread, He blessed it, broke it and giving it to the disciples, said: “Take it, eat it: this is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me.” Then having taken the chalice with wine and giving thanks, He handed it over and said: “Drink from it all of you. This is my blood of the

New testament (covenant), which is poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:26-28). This institution of the Sacrament of the Holy Communion is usually called the Last Supper.

After Jesus Christ spoke for the last time with His disciples regarding the Kingdom of God, He went with them to the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus took Peter, James, and John along and said to them: “Stay here and keep watch.” Going a little further, He fell to the ground and prayed to His Father in a sweat of blood that the cup of suffering which lay ahead would pass from Him.

At that time a crowd of armed servants of the high priest under the leadership of Judas broke into the garden. Judas betrayed his Teacher by kissing Him. While the high priest Caiaphas gathered the members of the Sanhedrin, the warriors led Jesus into the palace of Annas. Then He was then taken to Caiaphas late at night, and a judgment against Him took place. Although many false witnesses were called, no one was able to point to any crime for which Jesus Christ could be condemned to death. Nevertheless, the death sentence was pronounced after Jesus Christ acknowledged to the high priest that He was indeed the Son of God and the promised Messiah. For this, Jesus Christ was formally accused of blasphemy, which by Jewish law was punishable by death. Then in great anger the members of the council repeatedly struck Jesus, mocked and spit on Him.

The next day, on **Friday** morning, the high priest and members of the Sanhedrin went to the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, who was governor of Judea, to confirm the death sentence. At first, Pilate did not agree because he saw no guilt in Jesus Christ that deserved death. Then the high priests and scribes began to threaten Pilate with denunciation to Rome, and so Pilate finally agreed not to oppose the death sentence by symbolically washing his hands. Jesus Christ was given to the Roman soldiers, who tied Him up and whipped Him mercilessly.

At about noon, together with two robbers, Jesus Christ was led off to Golgotha, a small hill off the west side of the Jerusalem wall, and there He was crucified, the most cruel punishment of that time, given mostly to slaves who committed murder. He accepted His execution without a murmur and even prayed for His enemies. It was noon. Suddenly the sun grew dim, and for three hours darkness spread throughout the world.

After hanging on the cross for several hours and losing much blood, Jesus Christ called loudly to His Father: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!” Then, seeing that everything had come true according to the prophecies of the Old Testament, He exclaimed: “It is finished. My Father, into Thy hands I commend My soul!” and, bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. There followed terrible signs: the curtain in the Jewish temple was rent in two, the earth shook, and tombstones fell in pieces. Seeing this, a Roman centurion exclaimed: “Truly He was the Son of God!”

No one doubted Christ's death after a soldier pierced Jesus's side with a spear and from the wound came forth blood and water. Two members of the Sanhedrin, Joseph and Nicodemus, secret disciples of Jesus Christ, received permission from Pilate to remove His body from the cross and buried Him in Joseph's tomb in a garden near Golgotha. The members of the Sanhedrin,

being aware of the prophecy of Jesus about His resurrection and making sure that His body would not be stolen by His disciples, sealed the entrance to the tomb and placed Roman guards there. Everything was done in a hurry because the Passover was to begin that evening.

Early on **Sunday** morning, (probably the 8th of April) the third day after His death on the cross, Jesus Christ arose from the dead and left the sealed tomb. No one saw Him leaving the tomb. After that an Angel descended from heaven and cast the stone from the tomb's entrance. The first witnesses of this event were the soldiers who were guarding the tomb of Christ. Although they did not see anyone removing the body of Jesus, looking into the tomb after the Angel cast away the stone, they saw it empty. Frightened by the Angel, the soldiers ran away. Mary Magdalene and the other women, later called the myrrh bearers, went to the tomb of Jesus Christ before dawn to anoint with myrrh the body of their Teacher according to the Jewish tradition. Unexpectedly they found the tomb empty and shortly afterwards they had the honor to see the Resurrected One Himself and to hear from Him the greeting: "**Rejoice!**" On the first day of resurrection Jesus Christ appeared first of all to His Mother and later at different times to many of His disciples. He ate with the Apostles to reassure them that He was not a ghost, and the Apostle Thomas even had the honor of touching the wounds on His resurrected body. For forty days afterwards Jesus Christ repeatedly appeared to His disciples and gave them their last instructions.

A comment about the appearance of Our Lord Jesus Christ

The holy apostles, writing about the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, did not mention anything about His external appearance. For them it was most important to emphasize His spiritual features and teaching.

In the Eastern Church a belief exists about the "Holy, not made with human hands, image of our Savior." According to that belief, an artist summoned by Avgar, king of Edessa, tried several times but was unsuccessful at portraying an image of the Savior. Jesus Christ, having called the artist to Him, put His face to the canvas, and His image became impressed on the cloth. Having received that image from his artist, king Avgar was healed from leprosy.

Since then this miraculous image of the Savior has been known in the Eastern Church, and from it copies were made on icons. The original Holy image is mentioned by the ancient Armenian historian Moses Horensky and by Saint John Damascene (in the middle of the 8th century).

In the Western Church, there is a similar belief regarding the image of Saint Veronica, who gave the Savior a towel as He was going to Golgotha so that He could wipe His face. On that towel, which later appeared in the West, there remained the imprint of His countenance.

In the Orthodox Church, it is the custom to portray the Savior on icons and on frescoes. These portrayals do not attempt to accurately reproduce His external appearance. They more readily are reminders, by means of symbols, of His presence. Their purpose is to elevate our thoughts to the One who is portrayed on them. While gazing at the portrayal of the Savior, we recollect His life, His love and compassion, His miracles and teachings. We recollect that He, being omnipresent, resides with us, sees our hardships and helps us. This gives us an incentive to pray to Him to

gether with all those who saw Him during His presence on the earth: “Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on us!”

The teachings of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Of his teachings, Jesus Christ spoke thus: *“For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the Truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me”* (John 18:37). Therefore, we must accept with devotion Christ's every word as an absolute and unchangeable Truth and build on it our views and our life.

Jesus Christ spoke of Himself as the Savior of mankind: *“For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as ransom for many”* (Matthew 18:11, 20:28). The Son of God had taken upon Himself the mission of saving mankind to fulfill the will of God the Father, *“Who so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16).

Jesus Christ taught that He has one nature with God the Father: *“I and the Father are one,”* and that He simultaneously *“descended from heaven”* and *“exists in heaven,”* i.e., He resided both on earth as man and in heaven as the Son of God, being God-man. (John 3:13 and 10:30). Therefore, *“all must honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honors not the Son honors not the Father which has sent Him”* (John 5:23). Jesus Christ professed the truth of His Divine nature, for which He was condemned to death by the Sanhedrin. Thus the members of the Jewish council notified Pilate: *“We have a law, and by our law He must die, because He proclaimed Himself the Son of God”* (John 19:7).

Having turned away from God, people strayed from the true faith in their Maker, from the understanding of their own nature, imprinted with the image of God, of their aim in life, of what was good and what was bad. The Lord Jesus Christ disclosed to us what is basic and most important in faith and life, and gave guidance to our thoughts and aspirations. Speaking of the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Apostles wrote that *“He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people”* — blessed tidings of the coming of the Kingdom of God among men. (Matthew 9:35). Often the Lord began His instructions with the words: *“The Kingdom of God is like...”* From this, one must conclude that in the divine plan human beings are called upon to save themselves not individually but in concord, as one big spiritual family, using the God given means with which He endowed His Church. These means can be expressed by two key words: **Grace and Truth**. They constitute the spiritual treasure given to us by Christ!

Christ's teaching about salvation can be subdivided as follows: a) on the necessary conditions for man's entrance into the Kingdom of God, b) on Christian life, and c) on the nature and order of this Kingdom. These topics will be presented next.

On the Necessary Conditions for Man's Entrance Into the Kingdom of God

The first step on the path to salvation is FAITH in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world sent by God. In other words we have to accept the fact that He is the Way, Truth, and Life, and that no man comes to the Father except through Him. (John 14:6). On the question of the Jews, what they must do to gain the favor of God, Jesus answered, *"The work of God is this: to believe in the One He has sent"* (John 6:29), and *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God will abide on him"* (John 3:36).

To believe in Jesus Christ means not only to acknowledge His Divine nature but requires also **to accept** simply, trustingly, with our whole heart, as children, all His teachings, without any reservations or corrections. This type of sincere faith the Lord expects from us when He says, *"Truly I say to you, unless you change and become as children you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:3). This heartfelt faith in the Savior enlightens the intellect of man and illuminates his life's path according to the promise of the Savior: *"I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

In drawing mankind toward His Kingdom, the Lord calls everyone to a righteous way of life, saying: *"Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matthew 4:17). To repent means to condemn all of one's sinful acts, to change one's way of thinking, and to resolve, with the help of God, to begin a new way of life based on love for God and neighbor.

One does not become a righteous person just by wishing to be such but requires all the help one can get. The divine help comes to us in **Baptism** and other Sacraments instituted by Christ. In the Sacrament of Baptism all sins of the believer are forgiven; he is reborn spiritually and becomes a citizen of the Kingdom of God. Regarding this important step in salvation the Lord said: *"Truly, truly, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God ... That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* (John 3:5-6).

When sending His Apostles to preach throughout the world, Jesus Christ commanded them, *"Therefore go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you ... Whoever believes and is baptized, will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned"* (Matthew 28:18, Mark 16:16). The words *"Everything that I have commanded you"* underline the **wholeness** of the Savior's teaching, in which all is important and necessary for salvation.

On Christian Life

In the nine beatitudes, (also known as the Commandments of the New Testament; see Matthew 5th chapter. Jesus Christ outlined the path for spiritual renewal. This path is composed of humility, penance, meekness, aspiration toward a virtuous life, charitable deeds, a pure heart, peace-making, and the witnessing of faith. With the words *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven,"* Christ is calling man towards humility, acknowledging his sinfulness and spiritual weakness. Humility is the basis for spiritual renewal. Through humility comes re

penitance — recognition of one's shortcomings. This seems painful, but *“Blessed are they that mourn, for they will be comforted”* — they will come to peace with themselves and with God. By attaining peace with God man himself becomes peace loving and kind. This is the third lever of virtue: *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”* — they will receive what was forcibly taken from them.

As an ill person on his way to recovery begins to feel hunger, so a sinner as he restores spiritual health begins to desire perfection or righteousness. This is expressed by the next commandment: *“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled,”* in other words, with God's help, they will attain it. Experiencing at this level the great mercy of God, man begins to feel compassion for others: *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”* As a charitable person overcomes his passionate desire of material goods and related turmoil, His heart, like the water of a quiet lake, becomes more and more permeated with divine light. *“Blessed are the pure of heart: for they shall see God.”* This vision gives him wisdom to guide others and helps them to find peace with themselves and with God. In his peacemaking mission, the servant of Christ becomes likened to his Master, who came to the world to pacify mankind with heaven. This is expressed by the next commandment: *“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”*

The last commandment states that the sinful world cannot tolerate genuine righteousness. It rises up in hatred against its bearers. But we must not grieve, for *“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!”* After all, this suffering is a small price to pay considering the greatness of the reward in heaven.

Further in the Sermon on the Mount, (Matthew chapters 5-7) the Lord teaches us not to be vindictive, to overcome anger, to be chaste, to be true to our word, to forgive our enemies, to strive for the genuine righteousness that is in the heart of man. He describes how to dispense kindness and mercy, how to pray and fast, so that these deeds may be favorable to God. Furthermore, He calls on man not to be greedy and have hope in God's providence. He teaches us not to judge others and to be constant in our good deeds.

Repeatedly our Lord warned us not to become attached to worldly goods, *“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Mark 8:36). A man striving toward wealth is far from God because *“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Luke 12:31). The greatest treasure for man is to be in communion with God. Therefore, *“seek His Kingdom first, and all other things shall be given to you”* (Luke 12:31). The spiritual preciousness of the Kingdom of God Jesus Christ expressed in several of His parables: *“The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it”* (Matthew 13:44-46).

Man's greatest concern must be to **save his soul**. The path to salvation goes through spiritual renewal, which at times seems difficult because any growth is based on resolution, work and self-

denial. This is what Jesus meant saying: *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it”* (Matthew 7:13). There are also unavoidable temptations, difficulties and sorrows. They are the cross, which we must carry on the way to heaven: *“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me”* (Matthew 16:24). In essence, *“The Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force, and those who use force shall take it”* (Matthew 11:12), translated from Greek according to the commentaries of the early Fathers. The divine help is always available; we just have to remember where it comes from: *“Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak ... In your patience save your souls”* (Mark 14:38; Luke 21:19), translated from Greek.

Having come into the world because of His great love for us, the Son of God taught His followers to make love the basis for life, saying: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the laws and prophecies,”* and *“this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you”* (Matthew 22:39; John 15:12). Love necessarily manifests itself in deeds of charity: *“I want charity, not sacrifices”* (Matthew 9:13, Hosea 6:6).

In mentioning the cross, the sorrows, and the narrow path to salvation, Jesus encourages us with the promise of His constant help: *“Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you will find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light”* (Matthew 11:28). The Beatitudes, like all the teachings of the Savior, are permeated with faith in the victory of good and of spiritual joy: *“Rejoice and be exceedingly happy, for great is your reward in heaven ... Here I am with you always till the end of time”* — and He promises that all believers in Him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life (Matthew 5:3-12, 28:20; John 3:15).

On the Nature of the Kingdom of God

In order to clarify His teachings regarding the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ often used examples from daily life — parables. In one of them He likened the Kingdom of God to a sheep pen, in which the sheep dwell without fear, protected and led by a kind shepherd — Christ. *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and My sheep know Me. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father: The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, and those I must bring also to the fold. They too shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason My Father loves Me, is that I lay down my life, only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me. I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it up again”* (John chapter 10).

By this parable Jesus stresses the UNITY of the Kingdom of God, the Church. As many sheep gather in one fenced pen, so Christians must have one faith and one set of moral rules. All have one shepherd — Christ. Prior to His suffering on the cross, Jesus Christ prayed to His Father for unity of the faithful, saying: *“That all of them may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in*

You, that they also may be one in Us. That the world may believe that You have sent Me” (John 17:21). The first principle of unification in the Kingdom of God manifests itself in the love of the Shepherd for His sheep, and in the love of the sheep for the Shepherd. Love for Christ is expressed by obedience to Him and by striving to live according to His will: *“If you love Me keep My commandments.”* Mutual love among the faithful is the main attribute of His Kingdom: *“By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another”* (John 14:15, 13:35).

Divine **Grace** and **Truth** — these are the treasures with which the Lord endowed His Church. Grace and truth permeate her whole existence and are her very essence: *“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”* (John 1:17). The Lord promised His Apostles that the Holy Spirit will preserve intact His doctrines in the Church till the end of time. *“And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever — The Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him because it sees Him not, nor knows Him. But you know Him, for he dwells with you, and shall be in you ... When He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth”* (John 14:16, 16:13). Similarly, we believe that the blessed gifts of the Holy Ghost are effective in the Church now as they were in Apostolic times. They will be available to all true Christians until the end of time, reviving them and satisfying their spiritual thirst: *“Whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him, a well of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:14).

Just as it is necessary for any nation to have laws, rulers, and various establishments, without which it cannot exist, so does the Lord Jesus Christ provide the Church with everything necessary for the salvation of the faithful — the doctrine of the Gospels, the blessed Sacraments and spiritual teachers and pastors. Of this He spoke to His pupils: *“As my Father has sent me, even so I send you. And when He said this, He breathed unto them, and said unto them: Receive the Holy Ghost”* (John 20:21-22). On the pastors of the Church, the Lord imposed the duty of teaching the faithful, of cleansing their consciences, and of reviving their souls. The pastors must follow the chief Shepherd in His love for the sheep. The sheep, in turn, must honor their pastors, follow their directions, for, as Christ said: *“He that hears you, hears Me; and he that despises you, despises Me”* (Luke 10:16).

Man does not become righteous instantaneously. In the parable of the wheat and chaff, Christ explained that, as in a sown field the chaff grows among the wheat, so are the unworthy found among the righteous children of the Church. Good and evil, “wheat” and “chaff,” are part of everyone's nature. Sometimes we sin because of our ignorance, inexperience or spiritual weakness. It is important to recognize our sins and repent. This is the process of becoming better Christians. But there are people who persist in their sins and disregard the forbearance of God. They are fooled by the devil, who, according to Christ's teaching, is the chief source of all evil among men. The Lord calls on all to fight temptations and ask for protection from the devil's temptations: *“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”* Knowing our spiritual weakness and inconsistency, the Lord invested the Apostles with the power to forgive sins: *“Anyone whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven, and anyone whose sins you do not forgive, they are not forgiven”*

(John 20:23). Here it is presumed that the sinner truly regrets his evil deeds and wishes to improve.

According to the parable of the wheat and chaff, evil will not endure forever in the Kingdom of Christ: *“Truly, truly, I say unto you, whoever commits sin, is a slave of sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but the son belongs to it forever. So if the Son [of God] sets you free, you will be free indeed”* (John 8:34). Of people who are stubborn in their sins, or who will not yield to the teachings of the Church, Christ ordered that they should be excluded from the blessed community, saying: *“If he refuses to listen to them [the witnesses], tell it to the Church; and if he refuses to listen even to the Church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector”* (Matthew 18:17). Here Jesus Christ commands the Apostles and their successors to excommunicate from the Church the heretics and the persistent sinners in order to maintain his Kingdom free from evil.

In the Kingdom of God the **true unity** of the faithful with God and, hence, with one another is attained. The source of this unity resides in the double divine-human nature of Christ, into which the faithful are incorporated by the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In Communion, by partaking of the human nature of Christ, the faithful mysteriously partake of His divine life and become living temples of the Holy Trinity, as He promised: *“We (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) will come to him and make Our home with him ... The people will not say about the Kingdom of Heaven: ‘here it is’ or ‘there it is,’ because the Kingdom of God is within you”* (John 14:23; Luke 17:21). Thus does the Kingdom of God enter into us. Jesus Christ was very explicit about the necessity of Communion. *“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you will have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:53). Without unity with Christ, man is like a fallen branch; he withers spiritually and is unable to perform good deeds: *“Remain in Me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain on the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:4).

Having taught His disciples the importance of unity with Himself, on Holy Thursday, the eve of His suffering on the Cross, the Lord established the Sacrament of Holy Communion and, in conclusion, commanded the Apostles and their successors: *“Perform this [Sacrament] in remembrance of Me”* (Matthew 26:26).

Jesus Christ consistently differentiated His Blessed Kingdom from the world around us, which is mired in evil. He said to His disciples: *“I have chosen you from among the world,”* i.e., discriminated you from it, and *“My Kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36). *“The prince of this world is the devil.”* He is the wolf, slayer of men, and the father of lies. The sons of the Kingdom, however, should not fear him nor his servants: *“The prince of this world (Satan) shall be banished ... Dare, for I have conquered the world”* (John 16:33). The Kingdom of Christ shall prevail until the end of the world, and all efforts of the devil and his servants to destroy the Kingdom of Christ will break as waves over rocks: *“I say unto you, you are Peter [you will become firm as a cliff], and upon this rock [the faith in Me] I will build My Church, and the gates of hell*

shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). These words speak not only of the physical existence of the Church until the end of time, but also of the preservation of its very essence of Grace and Truth.

Jesus Christ taught us not only by means of words but also by **His example**. He manifests to us a perfect pattern of virtue. *“My food is to do the will of the One who sent Me and to accomplish His work,”* said Christ (John 4:34). Every action, word and thought of His was permeated with an ardor to carry out the will of the Father.

As we become more acquainted with the life of the Savior as it is described in the Gospels, we will find in His actions the highest example of virtue. Bearing this in mind, we must understand that we can follow Christ only in that which is accessible to us mortals, especially His humbleness and meekness, His obedience to the Father, His unselfishness and dedication, His chastity and purity in intentions, His deep compassion and love. We dare not try to reproduce His individual actions such as His superior knowledge and absolute power, but we can and must follow the general spirit of His virtuosness. Thus everyone of us finds in Christ an ideal, living model. Jesus said, *“Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect!”* Of course, we cannot see the Father directly, but we do see Him through Jesus Christ, as He explained later: *“Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father”* (Matthew 5:48; John 14:7).

Conclusion

So, as we have seen, all of the Savior's life and teachings were directed toward the founding of new spiritual principles in a man's life: a pure faith, a living love of God and neighbor, and an aspiration toward moral perfection and holiness. It is on these principles that we must build our philosophy and life.

The story of Christianity shows that not all people nor all nationalities were able to elevate themselves to the high spiritual principles of the Gospels. The affirmation of Christianity in the world has progressed on a treacherous path. Sometimes the Gospels were accepted superficially, without sincere aspiration to improve one's heart; sometimes they were totally rejected and prohibited. Nevertheless, all the high principles of freedom, equality and brotherhood by which present day democratic governments distinguish themselves, are in fact borrowed from the teaching of Jesus Christ. All attempts to substitute His Divine principles by human moral precepts, like the contemporary “New Age” philosophy, will, in time, bring catastrophic consequences. In order to be convinced of this, one has only to look at the consequences paganism and materialism have had upon mankind throughout history.

Thus, having before us such a wealth of examples of failure, we conclude that only in the teaching of the Savior can people find guidance for the resolution of their contemporary social and family problems. Building our life on Christ's commandments, we console ourselves with the thought that the Kingdom of God will certainly prevail. Any success of evil and the rule of the antichrist are transient events. On the last day of this world the King of glory, our Lord Jesus Christ, will come to resurrect all. He will judge the fallen angels and all evildoers. Then on the

renewed earth there will come the promised peace, happiness, and everlasting life. We pray to God to make us worthy to inherit it!

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Addendum

Creature or Creator?

Introduction

“A Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offense”

Faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our religious convictions. This faith gives us spiritual strength, inspires us to do good, and gives direction to our efforts and to our expectations. Without it Christianity loses its inspirational power and is reduced to a collection of ancient myths and unfulfilled promises.

Though of great importance, Christ’s divinity is not self-evident. There are even some passages in the Gospels which seem to contradict it. Therefore, those who dispute the divinity of Christ have no difficulty in finding biblical texts which supposedly support their opinion that Jesus Christ was either a man or some incarnate spiritual creature and therefore cannot be called God in the true sense of the word. At the same time opponents of the faith of the divinity of Christ point to the absence of biblical texts in which Jesus called Himself God, and from this they draw the incorrect conclusion that this title was given to Him later.

Contradictory opinions concerning the nature of Christ began to spring up from the very first days of Christianity. Quite serious disputes and disturbances were caused in the fourth century A.D. by the Arian heresy, which taught that Jesus Christ was only a creature, although the most perfect and powerful one ever created. This heresy was thoroughly discussed by the First Ecumenical Council which was held in the city of Nicaea in 325. The Fathers of this Council rejected Arianism and composed a Symbol of Faith, or Creed, in which, using very precise statements, they expressed the true teaching concerning Jesus Christ. This Creed has been used by the Eastern Orthodox Church to this very day.

In our time the sect of Jehovah’s Witnesses has resurrected the defeated Arian heresy from the dust of history. Their variation of it teaches that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of a spirit-son or an angel-like creature (perhaps of the Archangel Michael). The danger posed by the sect of Jehovah’s Witnesses comes from the fact that they possess seemingly unlimited financial reserves and thus flood the world with their literature and their preachers. A particularly aggressive missionary work is being carried on in Russia, where they have caught thousands of trusting people in the nets of their cult.

Orthodox people in Russia are in particular danger from these sectarian preachers because, not being use to the vagaries of living in a pluralistic society, they do not know how to defend their faith, and the majority of them are not very familiar with the Sacred Scriptures. On the other hand, the sectarian preachers are well versed in the texts that are useful to them, so that they can glibly overwhelm with quotations that suit their purpose.

The Scriptures on Jesus

Although the Holy Scriptures repeatedly call Jesus Christ the Son of God, those who would discredit His divinity cite the fact that the Scriptures use the term “sons of God” not only to refer to Jesus Christ, but also to angels and people. In order to clarify this question, we should remember that when referring to people or angels as sons of God, the Holy Scriptures always use the **plural** form, and never the singular. This makes it evident that they are “sons” not by nature but by the **grace of adoption**. (Otherwise, for example, the designation of the ungodly as “sons of the Devil” would lead to the absurd conclusion that they have a different origin than the faithful). The Holy Scriptures use the

singular form of the Son of God only when speaking of Jesus Christ. It is only to Him that the Holy Scriptures add clarifying terms such as the *Only Begotten, Beloved Son, Son of the Living God, True Son* — all of which unambiguously indicate that, unlike us, He is the **Son** in the true sense of the word and by His **divine nature**. That is why the Mormons grossly err by claiming that Jesus Christ had other god-brothers like Lucifer (Satan!) and others. The Holy Scriptures clearly distinguish between the Son and the sons: the first is begotten; all the others were created.

At the very onset of Jesus Christ's preaching, God the Father testified about Him saying, *"This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:17) Later, on Mount Tabor, the Father repeated these words adding: *"Hear ye Him"* (Matt. 17:5). This commands us to accept every word of Christ as **complete and infallible truth**.

But how can we respond to those who deny Christ's divinity, when He Himself said: *"My Father is greater than I ... Of that day and of that hour (the end of the world) knoweth no man — no, not the angels who are in Heaven, neither the Son, but only the Father... The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do... My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, unto to death ... not My will, but Thine be done"* (John 14:28; Mark 13:32; John 5:19; Mark 14:34; Luke 22:42). Besides, if Jesus Christ truly regarded Himself as God, then why did He not announce this clearly and unambiguously? By doing so, He would have dispelled all doubts about Himself.

The purpose of this article is to help the reader deal with these questions and to give him the necessary information to defend his faith in the divinity of Christ. In order to understand why Our Lord Jesus Christ did not announce publicly His divinity, let us mentally transport ourselves to the time of Jesus.

Imagine how people in the time of Jesus would have reacted to the words of a man who walked around declaring, "I am God!" Undoubtedly the crowd would have ridiculed Him as being out of His mind, while the zealots of the Jewish religion would have jumped at the chance to declare Him a blasphemer and demanded his execution. Only the pagans, who acknowledged many gods, might have accepted such a claim more seriously than the Jews, understanding it of course in terms of their superstitions. (Recall the reaction of the pagans to the miracles of the Apostle Paul as they were ready to declare him one of their gods and offer sacrifices to him, Acts 14:11). In our time people would turn away with scorn from any preacher who declared himself to be God. In any case, a direct declaration by the Savior regarding His divinity would not have had the desired result.

In fact, the Son of God did not come into our world to amaze His contemporaries with His omnipotence or to subject them to His divine power, but rather **to incite them to righteousness**. People had become so alienated from spiritual things and so morally corrupt that they were unfit to understand the truth of the divinity of Christ correctly. Let us recall from the Gospels how difficult it was for Christ to preach among the Jews and how much mockery He had to endure from the evil-minded scribes who strived to distort the meaning of His words and to prevent simple people from believing in Him. Therefore, the first thing that our Lord Jesus Christ had to do was to convince people to turn to God in repentance, reject their own religious prejudices, and sow in themselves the seeds of the true faith. In order to accomplish this, it was necessary to inspire them toward a righteous way of life, teach them to forgive, have compassion and love one another.

Such a deep spiritual shift in society could not have been accomplished by either threats or miracles. In fact, the manifestations of Christ's divine nature, brought about by His performing miracles, stirred up in the Jewish people unhealthy ideas about the coming of a glorious and mighty messianic kingdom on earth, in which they would rule over other nations. For this reason they were forbidden by our Lord to talk about the miracles He performed.

In order to accomplish the spiritual renewal of men and to make them receptive to the true faith, Christ chose to use **gentle and inspiring words and His personal example**. Out of compassion for a perishing human race, He undertook to share their poverty, burdens and sorrows. In order to heal their moral ulcers, He took upon Himself their sins and washed them away with His precious Blood on the Cross. The saving of the sinful human race, from the moment of Christ's incarnation to His suffering on the Cross, was a work of extreme voluntary self-abasement. In the words of the Apostle Paul, *"(Christ) being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant"* (Philippians 2:6-7).

This voluntary self-abasement of the Messiah is thus described by the prophet Isaiah: *"He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men,*

a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ... and we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth ... He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare His generation?" (Isaiah 53:2-8). With these concluding words the prophet was addressing the consciences of those who were to reject their Saviour, as if saying to them: You turn away in contempt from Jesus as He is mocked and beaten, but understand this, it is because of you sinners that He suffers so grievously. Contemplate His spiritual beauty, and maybe then you will be able to comprehend that He came to you from heaven.

While voluntarily abasing Himself for the sake of our salvation, Christ nevertheless **gradually** revealed the mystery of His oneness with God the Father to those who were capable of rising above the crude ideas of their contemporaries. Thus, for instance, He said to the Jews: *"I and My Father are one ... He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father ... I am in the Father and the Father in Me ... all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine ... We will come unto him and make our abode with him"* (John 10:30, 14:9, 14:10, 17:10 and 14:23). These and other similar expressions all indicate **His divine nature**. In addition, Christ gradually revealed those characteristics of His which no one but God can possess. For instance He referred to Himself as the **Creator** when He said: *"My Father worketh hither to, and I work "* (John 5:17). It is significant that the Jews hearing these words wanted to stone Christ as a blasphemer, *"because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God"* (John 5:18). By not correcting their interpretation of His words, the Lord confirmed that they understood Him properly.

At other times, the Lord Jesus Christ referred to Himself as being **eternal**. For instance when the Jews asked Him *"who art Thou?"* Jesus replied *"Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning"* (John 8:25). Shortly after this He added: *"Verily, verily I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM"* (John 8:58). Here it must be noted that Jesus had not said "I was," as would have been grammatically correct in the context, but rather used the present tense *"I am,"* or more exactly, *"I am He who is."* The deep meaning of these words becomes clear when one considers the Hebrew original meaning. When Moses asked God's name at the burning bush, the Lord answered: *"I am He who is"* (YHWH). The very name *"He who is"* (YHWH) indicates the distinguishing characteristic of God. He is the One who **always exists**; He is the Eternal One. In referring to Himself as *"He who is"* (YHWH), Jesus Christ used the Hebrew name for God. It should be remembered that the name YHWH was held in such esteem by the Jews that they used it only on the most important and solemn occasions, while in ordinary speech they used the names Lord, Creator, Most High, the Blessed One, and so forth.

After His resurrection from the dead, Christ again referred to Himself as **eternal**: *"I Am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," saith the Lord who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty"* (Rev. 1:8). On other occasions He called Himself **omniscient** (all-knowing), saying *"As the Father knoweth Me, even so I know the Father"* (John 10:15). Truly the essence of God is beyond the comprehension of finite beings. Only God can know His own nature perfectly. The Lord Jesus Christ also called Himself **omnipresent** when He said: *"No man hath ascended up to heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man who is in heaven ... For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them"* (John 3:13, Matt. 18:20). Here again Christ used the word *is*, meaning that not only was He or will He be in heaven, but He also abides there constantly.

Thus, since He shares with the Father all the divine attributes (creation, eternity, omniscience, omnipresence, etc.), Jesus Christ must be acknowledged by all as being **equal to the Father** as well. *"All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father who sent Him"* (John 5:23). All that has been said here should convince an unprejudiced person of the unquestionable truth, that Jesus Christ is **true God of true God**, equal to the Father by nature.

Although Jesus Christ avoided calling Himself God directly so as not to incite the people unnecessarily, He did commend those who were able to lift themselves up to the acceptance of this truth. Thus, for example, when the Apostle Peter said in the presence of other Apostles: *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,"* the Lord approved his confession of faith and added that Peter had come to such a conviction not simply by his own observations but by a special enlightenment from on high. *"Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not*

revealed this to thee, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 16:16-17). Similarly, when the Apostle Thomas, seeing the risen Savior, exclaimed: *“My Lord and my God!”* (John 20:28), Christ did not reject his addressing Him in this way but mildly reproached Thomas for being slow to believe. *“Thomas, because thou hast seen Me (risen), thou hast believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (John 20:29).

Finally let us remember that Christ was condemned to be crucified precisely because He formally admitted His divinity. Indeed, when the high priest Caiaphas asked Christ under oath: *“Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”* Christ responded: *“It is as you said”* (Mark 14:61, Matt. 26:64, Luke 22:70, John 19:7). Here Christ had responded using the prescribed form of an affirmative answer.

Now where did Caiaphas, many of the Jews, and even demons (!) get the idea that the Messiah was to be the Son of God? There is just one answer: from the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament. Its intent was to prepare the Jews and the whole world for this belief. Indeed, King **David**, who lived a thousand years before the birth of Christ, referred to the Messiah as God in three of his psalms; Psalms 2, 54 (55), and 108 (109). The prophet **Isaiah**, who lived seven-hundred years before the birth of Christ, revealed this truth even more clearly. Foretelling the miracle of the Incarnation of the Son of God, Isaiah wrote: *“Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”* (which means *“God with us,”* Isaiah 7:14). A little later the prophet reveals more precisely the character of the Son who would be born: *“and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”* (Isaiah 9:6). These titles cannot apply to anyone other than God. The prophet **Micah** also wrote of the eternal character of the Child who was to be born: *“But thou Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto Me He that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”* (Micah 5:2).

The prophet **Jeremiah**, who lived about two hundred years after Isaiah’s time, calls the Messiah Lord: *“The Lord our righteousness”* (Jer. 23:6, 33:16). Surmising Him to be the same Lord who called him to preach, Jeremiah’s disciple, the prophet **Baruch**, wrote these remarkable words about the Messiah: *“This is our God, and no other can be found to compare to Him. He has found the complete way of knowledge and has given it to Jacob His servant, and to Israel His beloved. Afterward He was seen upon earth, and spoke with men”* (Bar. 3:35-37). In other words God Himself would come to earth and live among men!

Given these definite indications in the Holy Scriptures, the more perceptive of the Jews could without hesitation recognize in Christ the true Son of God. (For further details on this subject see our booklet “The Old Testament on the Messiah”). It is noteworthy that even before the birth of Christ the righteous **Elizabeth** greeted the Virgin Mary who was expecting the Infant with these exultant words: *“Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And why is it granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”* (Luke 1:42-43). Clearly, St. Elizabeth could have had no other Lord than Him whom she had served from her childhood. As St. Luke the Evangelist explains in these words, Elizabeth spoke them not on her own but through the **inspiration of the Holy Spirit**.

Having acquired a firm belief in the divinity of Christ, the Apostles planted this belief in Him throughout all nations. St. John the Theologian begins his Gospel with the revelation of the divine nature of Jesus Christ:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:1-18).

The name *Word* bestowed upon the Son of God reveals better than any other name the mystery of the inner relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Holy Trinity, God the Father and God the Son. A thought and a word are distinct from each other in that the thought dwells in the mind, whereas the word is the expression of the thought; yet the two are inseparable. The thought does not exist without the word, nor does the word without the thought. A thought is like a word which is concealed within, and a word is that which gives expression to the thought. The thought takes the form of a word to convey the content of the thought to its hearers. Looked at in this

way, the thought, being an independent principle, is the father of the word, and the word is the son of the thought. The word cannot exist prior to the thought, yet it does not originate from without; it comes from the thought and remains inseparable from the thought. Similarly, the Father, the supreme and all-encompassing Thought, produced from His bosom the Son, the Word, His first Interpreter and Herald (from St. Dionysius of Alexandria).

The **Apostles** spoke of the divinity of Christ with complete clarity: *“And we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us understanding, that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ”* (1 John 5:20) ... *“of whom are the fathers, and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever”* (Romans 9:5) ... *“Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13) ... *“Had they (the Jews) known (the wisdom of God), they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”* (1 Cor. 2:8)... *“For in Him (Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”* (Col. 2:9) ... *“And beyond controversy, great is the mystery of godliness”* (1 Timothy 3:16). And in the first and second chapters of his epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul the Apostle proves conclusively that the Son of God is not a creature but the Creator and that He is immeasurably superior to all beings created by Him. Angels are simply ministering spirits.

One Person, Two Natures

It must also be kept in mind that calling the Lord Jesus Christ **God** (*Theos*) in itself speaks of the **fullness of divinity**. From a logical, philosophical point of view, there cannot be a “second class” God, a God “lower in rank,” a “limited” God. The attributes of the divine nature are not subject to conditionality or lessening. If He is God, then He is so completely, not partially.

Only if we assume a unity of Persons in God is it possible to join in one sentence the names of the Son and the Holy Spirit on an equal basis with the name of the Father: *“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matt. 28:19). *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all”* (2 Cor. 13:14). *“For there are three that bear record in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one”* (1 John 5:7). Here the Apostle John emphasizes that the **three are one** — i.e., one in essence.

One must clearly differentiate between the understanding of *person* (hypostasis) and the understanding of *nature* or *essence* (ousia). The word *person* refers to personality, to the “I,” and self-consciousness. The old cells of our organism die and are replaced constantly, but the self-consciousness remains throughout our whole life. The word “essence” speaks of nature and constitution. In God there is **one** nature but **three** Persons. Because of this, God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit communicate with each other and decide together. Each Person of the Trinity retains His individual properties which distinguish Him from the other Persons. But all the Persons of the Trinity share the same divine nature. The Son has the same essence as His Father and the Holy Spirit. The teaching about the Holy Trinity reveals to us the **inner** and hidden life in God, which actually is inaccessible to our understanding, but at the same time is absolutely indispensable for the correct faith in Christ.

Jesus Christ has **one** Person — that of the Son of God, but **two** natures — divine and human. In His divine nature He is equal to the Father — eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, etc.; in His assumed human nature He resembles us in every way: He grew, developed, suffered, rejoiced, vacillated in decisions, and so on. Christ’s human nature includes both **the body and the soul**. The difference is, that His human nature is totally free of sinful pollution. Since one and the same Christ is simultaneously God and man, the Holy Scriptures refer to Him sometimes as God and other times as a man. Even more so, sometimes human attributes are assigned to His divinity (1 Cor. 2:8), and divine attributes to His humanity. And there is no contradiction here, since all these attributes belong to the **same Person**.

Taking into account the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures regarding the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council decided to put a stop to all the misapplications of the term “Son of God” that lessened His divine dignity, and they therefore decreed that Christians believe: **“In one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with God the Father, by Whom all things were made.”**

The Arians heatedly objected to the Greek word meaning “one essence” (*homousios*) because it could not be explained in any other sense than the Orthodox one, meaning that Jesus Christ is recognized as **true** God, equal in everything to God the Father. For this reason the Fathers of the Council insisted that this particular word be used in the text of the Creed.

Conclusion

In summing up what has been said, we must remember that belief in the divinity of Christ cannot be planted in men’s hearts simply by scriptural citations or philosophical reasoning. What is needed is a **willful acceptance** of this God-revealed truth. It pleased God to uncover the hidden inclination of each person’s heart by their attitude toward Christ; *“Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes”* (Matt. 11:25). So in this regard, till the end of the world, things will be the same as they were two thousand years ago: for many people Christ will remain *“A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense ... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed”* (1 Peter 2:8; Luke 2:35).

There are many, even among the Jews and Moslems, who would recognize Jesus Christ as a great person and even a prophet, but could never accept Him as true God. Precisely because of the personal effort required to accept the divinity of Jesus, faith in Him is rewarded with eternal life: *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16).

This article does not attempt to “prove” that Christ is God because this truth requires faith. The purpose here is to help the Christian **clarify** his belief in our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ; namely, that He is the Creator, and we are His creatures.

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