

ORTHODOX BOOKLETS

**Basic substantial teaching on what
Orthodox Christians believe**



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WHO IS JESUS?

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Format Revised: March 2018.

WHO IS JESUS?

1 30-100AD

How do we find words to express who Jesus is? This has been the question since the very day he was born: what do we call him?

Let us look at what people at the time said.

Joseph was fortunate. An angel appeared and told him to call the boy Jesus. Names in those days were often deeply significant. A footnote to Mt 1.21 may tell you that Jesus is the Greek for the Hebrew Joshua, which means 'the Lord saves'. The angel tells Joseph he is to be called Jesus 'because he will save his people from their sins'.

The writer of the Gospel of Matthew may have been, as tradition relates, a tax collector and one of the apostles. At any rate, whoever he was, there can be no doubt he was of Jewish extraction and he may have been a scribe, possibly from Palestine, or from Antioch.

Each writer of the Gospels thought out the perspective in which he writes.

Matthew was hot on names. The Gospel begins with a genealogy (in Greek a 'genesis', a 'beginning') going back to Abraham. When he gets to Jesus he gives him another name, 'Christ', the 'anointed', the 'Messiah'. By the end of the first chapter he has added the prophecy that 'they will call him 'Emmanuel', that is 'God is with us'.

Matthew, writing perhaps only 25 or 30 years after the Resurrection, did a good job. He gives three highly significant names: Jesus, the Christ, and Emmanuel.

He has given Jesus a solid root in Judaism not only as Son of David, but one of universal importance because his ancestor was Abraham the 'father of all nations'. This root is emphasised by references to the fulfilment of several prophecies in chapter two. It is further emphasised in chapter three by reference to the Jewish expectation of 'one who will come', and to the words of John the Baptist that 'the Kingdom of God at hand'. Finally comes the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism: 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'. 'Son of David' is the first of a series of titles for who Jesus is: the next two, Son of God, and Son of Man, express the full range of perspective with which Matthew understands Jesus.

Just as Matthew began with a well-thought out perspective on Jesus at the beginning of his life he did so also at the end. There Jesus is given 'all authority in heaven and on earth'. He sends the worshipping disciples to 'go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' and 'teaching them to obey everything he has commanded them'. The one who was 'God with us' remains with us always: 'surely I am with you always to the end of the age' (28.16ff).

In every chapter Matthew uses these titles to reveal one or other aspect of the Kingdom of God and one who reigns in it as King. Throughout there is a fine tension between the past, the present and the future. The Son of David represents Jesus' past. Jesus in the present is God with us and the Kingdom with us. The element of 'not yet' is when Jesus will come in his Kingdom as the Son of Man. In his eyes all three are essential to do full justice to

the reality of Jesus.

Mark wrote only a short book on the Kingdom. The climax of his story, as for the others, comes in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

For Mark the secret of the Kingdom can only be understood by those who are disciples. The disciples are frequently told not to say anything. This is in contrast to Matthew, perhaps because Mark wrote at an earlier time. The disciples were to live quietly in the knowledge of this secret. However Christians know the secret of who Jesus is – the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of man, the Lord, the Son of David, the suffering servant and so on. The knowledge of the secret is precisely what all disciples have now.

Luke wrote for Gentile Christians. He explains that, while God's promises for the Jews were not fulfilled, they are for the Gentiles. The Gospel of Luke is the fully inclusive one – Jews and Gentiles, men and women, the unclean, the poor, the Samaritans, tax-collectors, and all manner of outcasts come into the Kingdom. In Acts, which Luke also wrote, the lame, the blind and the maimed also come into the Kingdom.

Luke however, as a good disciple of Paul, kept a continuity between new and old. The Gospel begins in Jerusalem, and Jesus calls Twelve to represent the Twelve tribes of Israel. The Church begins in Jerusalem and the reconstituted Twelve worship in the Temple. However by the end of the book Paul preaches the Gospel in Rome, the very heart of the pagan world.

Paul was a Pharisee. For him there was no question that there was only 'one God'. He then saw the Risen Jesus,

though later than everyone else. His conclusion was that 'the God, who (in the beginning) made light shine out of darkness, has made his light to shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor 4.6).

Paul as a Pharisee had looked for the Messiah. Now he recognised him in Jesus. Matthew had said Jesus was 'God with us', the presence included the presence of God's glory so dear to the Jews (in Heb. the 'shekinah'). Paul went further. He recognised 'the Lord of Glory' in the crucified Jesus. This was a revolution in Paul's understanding of God.

Though Paul sometimes had to defend his independence over against the other apostles, he was very much aware of the tradition of the church in its preaching, its liturgy, its formulas of faith and theology.

It is sometimes said Paul does not quote the Gospels and knew little about the earthly ministry of Jesus. This is misleading. He wrote before the written Gospels had appeared; and he does allude to or quotes sayings of Jesus. But the heart of the matter for Paul was his awareness that the Risen Jesus spoke directly in the Church. Paul had such a degree of union with the living Lord that he could say he had the 'mind of Christ'.

Because Paul was involved to the hilt in spreading the Gospel he had no doubt at all how fundamental was the experience of the church in understanding how Jesus was alive. In Corinthians he spoke of the church as the body of Christ. In Colossians and Ephesians he spoke of the Risen Jesus as the Lord of the whole cosmos. Yet his fulness dwelt in the church as in his body. In the end,

through the church, that fulness will fill everything and everyone: it will be 'all in all'.

What Paul was saying was not in any way a different faith, one that had been 'developed' and changed, as some have supposed. How he put things was new but he was only expressing something that was already there. When Paul described the church as the body of Christ this was just as true at the time of Pentecost. When he said God's fulness dwelt in the church of his day that was just as true of the church in the beginning in Acts.

Likewise when Paul describes the Gospel as a 'mystery' once hidden in God but now revealed in these last times, this was not so very different from what the Book of Daniel had said and other apocalyptic writings of the Jews. What excited Paul was the power of God now revealed in the mystery. It is an active force – it is the potent Word of God at work (1 Thess 2.13). There is now an energy at work which can change peoples' lives. The energy of the Risen Christ himself possessed him. He saw that all around him God was working out his plan in history, he was working his 'righteousness', he was fulfilling his promises, and the whole creation was on tenterhooks awaiting its redemption. Through what he wrote, this same energy which was in him is able to grasp us also: that is, the Holy Spirit.

Paul calls Jesus the 'Son of God'. For Paul, given his Hebrew background, this probably meant, in the first place, the divine election of Jesus as the one who is accomplishing the purposes of God. This was probably what the word meant at the time in which Jesus lived. However this phrase could also be read to imply that Jesus was made or declared the Son of God at some

point in the process, say at the baptism or the resurrection. Some Christians undoubtedly held this view of Jesus as the Son of God.

However Paul, in Philippians (2.6), makes it clear that the Son had a divine status 'equal to God' before ever the process of salvation had begun.

Colossians refers to Jesus as the Son who was the 'image of the invisible God', 'the firstborn of all creation'. (Col 1.15.17; 2.9) The Son of God therefore has his existence long before his birth of the Virgin Mary.

In Paul's time the word 'Christ' had become virtually the second name of Jesus. For Paul 'Christ' undoubtedly expressed the pivotal nature of the place of the Risen Jesus in the fulfilment of God's plan for his people.

The church called Jesus 'Lord' just as previously the Jews had called on God as Lord. This is evident in the formulas of faith and of worship already in use (1 Cor 12.3, Rom 10.9, Phil 2.6ff, 1Cor 16.22). In Paul 'Lord' refers to the Risen and exalted Christ in the same way as it did for God himself.

When Christians called Jesus 'Lord' they were acknowledging the Risen and Glorious Christ as the one who was in control of the world and the one whom they now served and obeyed as God.

Paul calls Christ 'the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor 1.24). These words also speak of God's activity in the world.

Paul also brings 'Christ' and the 'Spirit' together but it is not altogether clear exactly what he means. There is a certain lack of precision here as there was everywhere in

the church at this moment in time. However in other texts Paul speaks clearly of three persons of God. The church later clarified how the three persons work in perfect harmony together.

The Gospel of John shows the process of thinking through the meaning of words at its best.

The opening chapter uses a whole series of titles. John the Baptist is interrogated, by religious authorities from Jerusalem, as to whether he himself is the Messiah, Elijah or the prophet. John refers them to Jesus. Two of the Baptist's disciples then follow Jesus and call him 'Rabbi' and 'Messiah'. Finally Nathaniel, realising Jesus knew him while he was still under the fig tree, calls Jesus the 'Son of God, the King of Israel'. Jesus says: 'you have not seen anything yet'.

In the centre of this process of sifting words was John the 'Beloved Disciple'. The process continued after Christians were expelled from the synagogue in AD 70 – a reality reflected in this Gospel

The very first words of this Gospel reveal the profoundest perception of Jesus to date.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning'.

'Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it'.

'There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning

that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. This was the true light that gives light to every man who comes into the world.'

'He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only (or, Only Begotten), who came from the Father, full of grace and truth'.

'John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. 'For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the Only begotten, who is at the Father's side, has made him known'. (1.1-14)

John understood that the Gospel began before creation. It goes back to the very relationship between God and his 'Word'. The Word himself was God. He has come into the world as 'Life' and 'Light' and therefore has made God known. He has taken flesh and dwelt among us that the world may see God and see his glory.

We hear that 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not

perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him'. (3.16-17)

The Gospel begins with the love of the Father in sending his Son. The Gospel reveals the Father's love because the Son loves the Father and loves the whole world enough to die for it.

When Jesus had told Nathaniel that he had seen nothing yet, he added 'you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'

The glory (Heb: 'kabod') had been seen in key moments of the revelation of God in the Old Testament (Ex 16, 24, Lev 9, Num 14, 2 Chron 5, Ps 19, Is 40). But John had seen his glory at the Wedding in Cana, at the Raising of Lazarus, and at the 'hour of glory' when Jesus was 'lifted up' on the Cross to draw all humanity to him.

John connected the great passages of the Old Testament (Is 40 ff), where God speaks of himself as 'I am he' and 'I am the Lord and there is no other' to Jesus.

The great 'I am' sayings in John – whether they stand alone or with a predicate such as life, truth, way, gate, resurrection, bread, vine or shepherd – apply to Jesus as God.

The church grasped the truth that the glory of God shone from the Risen Jesus.

The church saw that Jesus was 'the radiance of (God's) glory' (NIV) and the 'express image' of the Father' (KJV) (Heb 1.3). The Son is the 'radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being' (NIV).

In short in Jesus God had revealed himself.

After the Resurrection, the first 70 years or so (up to 100 AD) the church took the opportunity to tell the Jews what had happened with the coming of Jesus. The words they used were by and large taken from Jesus himself.

The church took every possible word in the Old Testament to show that they all apply to Jesus. They turned the whole theological structure of Judaism round to focus on Jesus. This is at its clearest in the Book of Hebrews. The book says in effect Jesus is everything and everything apart from him is now just history.

But their understanding grew beyond that. They realised the word 'Son' alone was insufficient to carry the full weight of this understanding of Jesus.

So they took the word 'Logos', used in John, translated in English as the 'Word' (or revelation) of God. They used this to develop an all encompassing theology of how God and the world are related to one another through Jesus.

They saw that Jesus was God's answer to the human predicament. In him is the solution of the separation of humanity from God caused by sin. In other words Jesus is the 'salvation' of everyone who believes.

This is important. The church was not on a trip to invent a new god or to make for itself a blaze of glory. It grasped that in Christ was something for everyone.

2 100-250 AD

The church, expelled from the synagogue, decisively won the battle of words, concepts and substance with the Jews.

At this time the majority of Christians were of Jewish descent. But there were also Jewish Christians who formed groups separate from the church. These regarded Jesus as a Prophet, or as the Messiah, but kept the Law. Some, like the Elkasites, lived in the hope of an 'apocalypse' to end everything.

For others Jesus was the one who overthrew the Law. They believed they had a freedom not to work and to eat forbidden meats. They also believed they had a freedom to indulge in ecstatic experiences and sexual licence. Paul had to move swiftly to head these ideas off. The later books of the New Testament speak out strongly against these 'antinomians' or 'libertines' as they were called.

The Jewish Christians eventually disappeared from history. But the Church owed to Christians of Jewish descent its 'feel' for the scriptures. The early church grasped the fundamental unity and continuity of the scriptures at a far deeper level than most people nowadays comprehend.

This enabled the church in the first place to make full use of the scriptures in worship. We see this in the writings of the Syrian Fathers (who knew Aramaic). They made an unsurpassed harmony of scripture and theology which they not only expressed in poetry but which they could sing. Later the Greek Fathers drew on this tradition for their own hymnody in the liturgy and daily offices.

In the Greek and Roman world, as distinct from the Jewish and Syrian one, Christians had plenty to do in facing up to the reality of martyrdom and speaking out on behalf of the persecuted.

Those who spoke out in this way are called the 'Apologists'. The main ones were Justin martyr, Athenagorus, Theophilus, Aristides, Melito, Tatian and the letter to Diognetus.

Their object was to show that the wild rumours about Christians were false. They explained that just because they ate the Body of Jesus and drank his Blood they were nevertheless not cannibals; that just because they did not bow to the gods of Rome they were nevertheless not atheists; that just because they held 'love-feasts' they did not indulge in immorality; that just because they did not obey the Law they were not guilty of sedition. Given this preoccupation they were not too concerned with theology.

The second century however produced its own theological stresses. Many groups were producing an alternative Jesus.

Now all that we are about to say might appear to be all so much history. But these groups are important because they show conclusively that every attempt to make an alternative Jesus is futile.

First there were the Docetists. They said the humanity of Jesus was not real.

They said Jesus only appeared (Gk dokeo) to be a man and that he did not really die.

They also said the eucharist was not really the Body and Blood of Jesus.

The church, and St Ignatius of Antioch in particular, would have none of this.

What the Docetists were saying was in effect that 'God'

had nothing to do with the real world. Therefore if Jesus was God he could have nothing to do with such a real thing as a human body and real things such as bread and wine.

To true Christians this God and this Jesus were simply a waste of time.

Others are known as 'Gnostics'. Among them different teachers taught different things. All of them however were interested in developing an overall theological philosophical system which could incorporate not only the Old Testament and Christ but also a so-called 'secret knowledge' passed onto them from the apostles; and further knowledge culled from Homer, Plato, 'science' and myths. They believed that in this way they could attain to 'knowledge' ('Gk 'gnosis'). This made them the elect, better and different from anyone else.

In this system Jesus was only a part of the whole complex.

Jesus might be regarded as having some sort of divinity but in this he was overshadowed by an ultimately unknowable God. They also believed he had no real body and did not die a real death.

For them in effect Jesus was neither God nor man.

The apostolic churches preserved their faith and unity around the core writings which they believed contained the testimony of the apostles. They preserved that faith and unity around the bishops, who maintained the apostolic ministry. Both ministry and scripture testified to the essential apostolic mysteries of baptism and the eucharist.

Marcion, in the second half of the second century, was the son of a bishop who had excommunicated him because of immorality. He could not accept that the God of the New Testament was the same as the God of the Old.

To his mind the God of the Old Testament simply did not live up to the standards taught by the God of the New. He could not accept that God could be angry, judge and punish. For Marcion it seemed the opposition between God the loving Saviour and the God of the Old Testament was so great that the only thing to do, in the name of improving the Gospel, was to dump the Old Testament.

To do so however would destroy the fundamental unity of the revelation of God as both Creator and Saviour.

Marcion did not resort to allegory, as many did, to resolve contradictions. He preferred the chopper. He cut out three Gospels out of the New Testament, various bits out of Luke which were not in harmony with his views, and all the rest of the New Testament except Paul - and even bits were cut from him.

Such an extreme position prompted the church to sort out exactly which books it approved of for reading. These steps led to eventually establishing the canon of scripture.

Marcion did however appeal to some. He set up churches which in time rejected belief in God as the Creator of the world. They opted for an eternal opposition between the God of Good and the power of Evil. In this they became inextinguishable from the later Manichees.

Montanism flourished in the same period. This rose on a tide of fervour which looked for a new outpouring of the

Spirit to usher in the End. They encouraged prophecy, extreme asceticism and martyrdom.

But the End did not come. Their preaching and prophesying were shown up as delusion – and they had also separated from and broken the unity of the church. This was another dead end.

In the early second century the church still appeared to be cautious, either because of the Jews, persecution, or because some still hoped for the end of everything. Gnosticism seemed to be more daring, creative and exciting.

The bishops however fought back. They had the wisdom to distance themselves from the doctrine of 'milleniarism', which, on the basis of one text in Revelation, taught Christ would return and reign on earth for a thousand years. They also rejected the doctrine of the encratites that extreme asceticism was obligatory.

Irenaeus in Gaul, Hippolytus in Rome, and Tertullian in Africa took on the heretics and pagans. Clement of Alexandria and Origen abandoned all defensiveness and attacked the beliefs of the Greeks, all the time declaring that what the Greeks looked for could be found in Jesus.

By the end of the second century the church was in a much better position. It became another major religious force alongside Judaism and paganism.

But religious confusion in the world at large was enormous (a bit like today). This affected Christians until the Councils and theologians of the church sorted things out.

Origen, in the third century, was the first in the church to

attempt to create a great overarching theology and spirituality. But in spite of his remarkable endeavour his vision still had flaws.

As the third century progressed the church was increasingly well-organised and was able to see off the fluctuating individualism of the Gnostics and the many absurdities of paganism. The churches of Antioch, Alexandria, Rome and Carthage were clearly identifiable as churches who were orthodox and catholic (universal), which had a common faith, discipline, hierarchy and canon of scripture.

But as persecution became less frequent and Christians had freedom to discuss things that still puzzled them, more unresolved questions came to the surface.

One such question was: if there was only one God, and in Christian eyes Jesus was worshipped as God, who exactly was the Father?

Noetus (about 200) said Christ himself must be the Father. This involved saying the Father was born, suffered and died.

Sabellius (about 220) disagreed. He said the Father, the Son and the Spirit were just 'modes' of appearance of the one God.

Both these are called 'modalism' because they resolve the problem by saying the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are only different 'modes' of 'God'.

At first Christians in Rome – even popes - and in Carthage did not find this too outrageous.

However others proposed a different solution. They said God sent his Spirit and this descended on Jesus at his

baptism. Jesus was a man but, because of the harmony of the divine and human will in him, God decided to 'adopt' him as his Son at his baptism. In this view the Father is the sole source ('mon-arche') of their unity. Hence it is called 'monarchianism'.

Modalism and Monarchianism however lead us back to Judaism. Jesus ends up as but the latest and the greatest of those sent by God.

All this shows what a big step it was to recognise the divinity of Christ tout court. There was no option but to cut out the lesser alternatives which will always let us down.

3 250 – 325

Another conflict was in the making between the great cities of Antioch and Alexandria.

Paul of Samosata was elected bishop of Samosata in the region of Antioch. Paul, like the Apologist Theophilus who was also from Antioch, and typically of the attitude in Syria and Arabia, set no store by philosophy.

Paul read and interpreted his New Testament in a straightforward and literal way. He believed the Virgin Mary gave birth to a man, and at the baptism of Jesus the Spirit took up his dwelling in him. Jesus was a complete human being to whom the Word or Spirit had joined himself.

In Judaism the Word and the Wisdom of God were not persons but activities of God. Only as activities were they one with him. This 'Spirit' was understood in the same way. In this cast of mind, the Word, the Wisdom and Spirit existed before creation. But Jesus, or Christ, did not.

These Christians believed that Jesus came into existence at his birth but that he did not have a divinity of his own but had a divinity only through what was dwelling in him. The Word dwelling in a man (or the 'Logos' in 'anthropos' (man)) is how this position can be summed up.

Paul saw no essential unity between the Word and Christ. For him God and man were in essence different. The fact that Christ in his humanity might participate in the Word did not change this.

In contrast the church in Alexandria had embraced philosophy as a way of resolving contradictions.

For them Christ was the Word pre-existent from before creation dwelling in the flesh ('Logos' in 'sarx' (flesh)). Here the Word is everything, the flesh is only a vessel. The Word was present in Christ not 'from without' but the two formed a unity in substance.

But the question in that case is: is Christ truly human, a true man?

Looking at Jesus Antioch saw the man, Alexandria saw God i.e. the pre-existent Word.

What do you see?

Many today see a man. They do so because they feel comfortable with that. They do not want to see a God, at least not in the sense of 'supernatural stuff'. They do not want to have to accept even the resurrection.

However once we meet the Risen Jesus we cannot avoid the supernatural.

God has united himself to our humanity; Christ has changed our humanity by his obedience. His divine life

transforms human life - the evidence is in the Saints.

But of there is a real divine nature in Jesus and a real human nature, how are the two really untied?

4 325-800

Some fifty years after Paul of Samosata there was a priest and teacher in Alexandria called Arius. He tried to clarify where the divine pre-existent Son of God (and Word) stood in relation to God and to creation.

Arius maintained that the Son and Word, though divine, was subordinate to the Father and in some way created.

He also believed that when the Word dwelt in the man Jesus, the Word itself underwent change, development and growth.

Alexander the bishop of Alexandria and his successor Athanasius, made it absolutely clear that the Son could not be in any way created. He was not created but uncreated. The phrase was coined: 'there never was a time when he was not'.

They also made it clear that the divine Son and Word were not subject to change or alteration.

The divine pre-existent Son and Word dwelt wholly in human flesh from the beginning, that is, from the birth of Jesus.

Alexander and Athanasius stood their ground on the experience of salvation. If Christ was the Saviour of humanity, he had to be fully divine. Only a fully divine agent, the Son of God himself, could save his creatures lost in sin and darkness and subject to the corruption of

death.

So when the divine Son of God became man, he was not subject to change.

Rather the Son reversed the disobedience into which all men had fallen by the obedience given by his humanity.

He banished the darkness in which all men dwelt by the radiance of his Light and Glory. These are evident in the Transfiguration and Resurrection.

Through his Resurrection he removed the corruption of death and replaced it with his own incorrupt life. 'Death was trampled down by death and to those in the tombs he had given life'.

Sin no longer reigned. The gates of Hell had been broken, Adam and Eve restored to Paradise.

The opinion of Arius was condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325 and this was reiterated in the Council of Constantinople in 381.

The Creed of Nicea and Constantinople in its final version declared:

'I believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one essence with the Father'.

The bright light of Christ's divinity and the radiance of his glory dominated the perception of Christ in Alexandria. However this could lead to an undervaluing the reality of his humanity. Or, to put it simply, they saw too much God and not enough man.

Apollinaris once a friend of Athanasius, made this an

error when he denied that the Word made flesh had a human soul. He regarded the fragile changeable soul as the source of weakness and depravity. This opinion, like that of Paul of Samosata before, was probably widely held in the East.

Basil the Great stood against Apollinaris because his Jesus was not real. The Council of Constantinople in 381 condemned it. The flesh which the Son of God had to be more than a container; it had to have all the qualities that make us human.

Christians in Antioch were aware of the close proximity of the Holy Land and therefore of Christianity's roots in Judaism. The humanity of Jesus had a strong appeal to them. For them the Son and Word of God dwelt in man (Gk anthropos) and not merely in 'flesh' (Gk sarx). Their teachers gave a full and proper place to the moral and human choices which Jesus had to make in his obedience to God.

For them the humanity of Jesus could never be swallowed up by his divinity.

However Nestorius, who came from Antioch, was promoted to be Bishop of Constantinople. One of his clergy had spoken out against using the term 'the Mother of God' for Mary, a title which had become very popular with the people. Nestorius supported him. No, he said, Mary had only give birth to a man.

Nestorius appreciated that Jesus was both divine and human. He repeatedly affirmed there was a unity between them. But he did not know how to say so.

If the natures, human and divine, were truly united then it was possible to say that Mary was the Mother of God.

What came forth from her was both man and God. This was what the church felt. Nestorius was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

Now the pendulum swung the other way. Some twenty years later, Eutyches so stressed about the unity of Christ that he blurred the distinction between the two natures.

He said that there was only one nature in Christ after the two were united.

The church tried to stop the pendulum swinging. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 excluded both extremes, that of Nestorius and that of Eutyches. It spoke of the two natures as being 'without confusion, without change (these excluded Eutyches), and 'without division, and without separation' (these excluded Nestorius).

The Council said the unity of Christ was a union in (Gk 'en') two natures. They did not speak of a union from (Gk 'ek') two natures.

Eutyches had also said Christ's humanity was not one with ours. This too was condemned. Such an opinion would effectively disassociate Christ from us and therefore rob him of the ability to redeem all of humanity.

In the seventh century an attempt was made to reconcile those who accepted the Council of Chalcedon and those who did not.

Some suggested that while there were indeed two natures in Christ, one human and one divine, there was only one mode of activity, energy, or will between them.

This was rejected by the Council of Constantinople in 681.

This left a disagreement between those who accepted the Council of Chalcedon and those who did not.

All the churches East and West believe in the Three Persons of the Trinity

They also believe Jesus Christ is both God and man.

They all believe there is only one subject in Jesus.

The churches however have still not seen eye to eye as to how that union should be spoken of – in two natures, or, of two natures.

The Alexandrians had developed their way of speaking about Christ over against Arius who had failed to recognise the Son's divinity.

The Antiochenes developed theirs over against Apollinaris who had not recognised a true humanity.

Alexandrians and Antiochenes had developed their ways of speaking about Christ over against different problems.

Today the churches, Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian, are listening to each other once again. They are trying to establish how both approaches can be understood as equally valid in expressing the same faith.

Where does this leave us?

Some people will always be attracted to the strong vibrant sense of God that was evident in Jesus.

Some will be attracted by the deep humanity which was obedient to God.

But those who are attracted to God must keep in touch with his humanity.

Those attracted by his humanity must acknowledge the

divinity.

The two natures, the divinity and the humanity, were both as real as each other.

Yet the two are fully united in one and the same person.

All 3 realities, the divinity, the humanity and the unity, must be maintained without losing out on any one of them

This is the Christ of the scriptures. We must accept the mystery, and worship the one who stands before us.

The Booklets

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- 4 The Holy Spirit
- 5 What is Salvation?
- 6 What is Tradition?
- 7 Why Liturgy?
- 8 The Interpretation of Scripture
- 9 Knowing the Will of God
- 10 The Way of Holiness
- 11 Living, Dying and Departed
- 12 The Saints