

The Person of the Christ from a Methodist-Catholic Perspective

The Messiah as described in the Books of Luke and its continuation, Acts of the Apostles, is a complex Being, both man and God. As such He has always held a singular fascination for me as a suppliant and sinner, and to my way of thinking not nearly good enough to approach the mercy seat at any time or in any fashion. Always bowing humbly at His feet with my eyes ever on my Savior and the Cross, I come to reflect on three of the more cogent points in the two part extrapolation.

First, the Being who is Christ, Joseph's son of the Household of David and Son of God, the Most High of Israel and the King of Kings. How he remains humble unto a death that He freely accepted for our salvation and for our eternal souls.

Secondly, how He was rejected by His own people and yet died for our sakes. How Jesus of Nazareth preached, healed, testified, and was ultimately rejected by his own kindred and yet triumphed over death and the grave.

Thirdly, there is the conversion of Zacchaeus and the parable of the lost who the Christ came to save and the ultimate embarkation of the Apostles to save and preach salvation to sinners. Acts is the beginning of the culmination of the age of redemption and the great missions work of the Apostle Paul, one of the iconic lions of the Church.

Beginning in Chapter 1, Luke, the Physician and traveling companion of Paul, delineates Christ the Son of Man, and the human-divine Person, whose genealogy he traces to Adam. Luke's narrative of the birth and infancy of the Lord is taken from the point of view of the virgin mother. Luke alone tells of Christ's boyhood and reveals more of his prayer life than any other Synoptics. Luke, therefore, is in many ways the Gospel of compassion, stressing the Lord's sympathy for the brokenhearted, the sick, the maltreated, and the bereaved. Luke opens with the dual pregnancies of the cousins: Elizabeth and Mary. The former pregnant with John the Baptizer, aka, the Baptist. The Latter pregnant through the intercession of the Holy Ghost, nee Spirit, with the Christ. Both births were miraculous and show the power of a

most high Divine being that is always on a different existence level than the ordinary human being. John is by his very nature and birth a divinely inspired life force who is predestined to be the way maker and precursor for the Messiah. As Isaiah foretold "A voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." John let it be known from the first that he was not the Messiah but one was coming "Mightier than I, the lachet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose." "He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." This then is the same Being who when John, his cousin, baptized Him in the River Jordan, the Holy Ghost descended from Heaven in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from that Same heaven saying "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased"

Christ then is tempted by the Satan after fasting in the desert for forty days. He resists three acts of temptation by Lucifer and is afterwards attended by Angels who feed him as he prepares for his three year mission in Galilee.

Next the Christ embarks on his mission of teaching, healing, converting, and preaching in the Synagogues of Galilee and throughout the region. This is shown by Luke through parables, stories, and adventures. All the while being mindful of Jesus' divinity. His overall divine authority humbly rendered.

First we notice whom He chooses to convert to his life altering way of faith. They are mostly the uneducated, so-called working men and laborers. Most of these are fishermen, sheep herders, and common farmers. People used to working with their hands. Christ does not call the Scribes nor the Pharisees. He has come to call the common man to repentance. These will be his "New Church" and will serve as a stumbling block for the "wise and high minded" who are ultimately conceited. The rich also will have no place in the kingdom and are not automatically granted entrance at the "Last Trumpet" through their money or exalted station in life.

Secondly, He heals, casts out devils, and brings to life the dead in body and spirit. Jesus regularly heals Palsy, Leprosy, Blindness, Cancer, and Insanity. He makes the lame to walk and the paralyzed to stand.

Jesus makes water into wine at Cana, cures the Gadarene Demoniac, raises the widow's son from the dead, walks on water, calms a sea tempest by His Word, raises Lazarus from the dead, restores sight to the blind beggar, feeds five thousand with three loaves and two fishes, and heals the 10 lepers. Jesus tells many Parables and teaches the way to salvation through belief in the Son of God, Himself. He is the way, the truth, and the Light only through Him are men saved. His is the only sinless life. He is the only perfect man.

In the the last year of his three year ministry, Jesus enters Jericho and makes a very important convert, Zacchaeus, the chief among the pulicans and very rich. When I was a young lad I heard a sermon in Darby, PA, a suburb of Philadelphia. It was delivered by an elderly Methodist minister, Rev. Charles Napper, on the theme of the saving of Zacchaeus. Rev. Napper had a booming voice and a dramatic delivery. Remember, this was about 50 years ago and I recall it vividly, still. The Rev. set the stage theatrically by relating Zacchaeus' small stature and his inability to see Jesus because of the press of the crowd. Being very curious he ran ahead and climbed into a sycamore tree to see as He passed. Reverend Napper boomed: "Looking up He saw him and said, Zacchaeus make haste and come down for to day I must abide at your house." "That very day was true salvation come to a sinners abode and his whole family was saved." "He thus said to the Master: behold I give half my goods to the poor and if I have taken anything by false accusation I return it fourfold." Jesus further seized the moment to answer the crowd who were murmuring, saying, that He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. Jesus said "This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a Son of Abraham." "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Here begins the rock of my faith and the beginning of my spiritual journey. I have always valued my personal friendship with Christ, although I am still attempting to emulate my Master. Mine is not a perfect walk but I am still endeavoring to be more Christ-like. Whenever I wanted anything I have always gone directly to God in prayer and have not used intercession, or praying through an agent. When I was a student I was traveling by car and the throttle on the engine stuck open so I could not

brake, or throttle down. I panicked and prayed for guidance on what to do. God answered me and told me to shut off the engine, which I did. Then I started again and this time the throttle had closed. I was able to continue my journey safely. To me this was my Damascus road. I always think of St. Paul on the road to Damascus and being knocked to his knees by Jesus in the form of a blinding light. He was on his way to persecute the Church and Christ converted him and recruited him to be a lion for the Lord. Paul went from virulent Christ -hater to Messianic Disciple. As a zealot Paul shares the “stage of Acts” with Peter, known as the “Rock” of the Early Church and the first Pope. Peter, or Petrus, the Rock, while , maintaining the Deity of Jesus(“God hath made that same Jesus whom ye hath crucified, both Lord and Christ”), gives special prominence to His Messiahship. Paul, fresh from the vision of the glory , puts emphasis on his deity. Peter’s charge was that the Jews had crucified the Son of David. Paul’s that they had crucified the Lord of Glory. The salient point was not that the Christ was God , a truth plainly taught by Isaiah, but that Jesus, the crucified Nazarene, was the Christ and therefore God the Son. Acts of the Apostles, therefore, brings into focus the God-Head Troika: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. As well as giving a running history of the Early Church in detail with all the Apostles carefully sketched and developed.

Luke, the physician, with a scientist’s practiced eye gives scope and a clear vision to the life of Christ, especially early and throughout his three year ministry. He then carefully delineates the history of the early church up to Paul’s arrival and early ministry in Rome. His intention is not to render a conclusion but more to sketch a beginning of the Church on a physical level but more importantly on a spiritual level. Luke more or less raises the curtain on the Age of the spread of the “Good News” and bridges the time gap to the Pauline Books.

Professor Anthony E. Lee/July 24th, 2009

