

# Jesus Is Lord! Christianity's Life-Changing Confession of Faith

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In January 1990, an old man in pajamas sitting on the edge of his bed was interviewed for a television broadcast in Romania. He was the noted philosopher, Petre Sutea. What did he think of the recent revolution, he was asked.

"What revolution?" was his rhetorical reply. Thinking perhaps that his age or his hearing had prevented his understanding the question, the interviewer gently rehearsed the events of the previous month, in which the Ceausescu regime had been toppled. Sutea replied, "That was no revolution! There has been only one revolution in the history of mankind, the Incarnation of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ!"

What is it about the Incarnation that would enable a Christian to make such a boast? What does it mean, that God would take flesh and dwell among us? What does it say about both God and man? What does it say, to you and to me, right now?

The earliest confession of faith of the Church has been the simple declaration that Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord! This conviction literally turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). It still provokes the strongest contention. To proclaim that Jesus is Lord demarcates the Christian from the rest of the world. It sums up the Christian faith in three words, and it is far different from merely noting that Jesus was born or that Jesus lived or died.

By the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian era, the belief that Jesus is Lord has affected the entire globe in one way or another. Even the atheists and agnostics of our day cannot pen a letter or date a check without making reference to the Incarnation, whether they know it or not. Yet, unless our own lives are being turned upside down by the Incarnation of the Son of God, unless the revolution which is God coming in the flesh takes hold of our very being personally, we face the next year, and the year after that, ad infinitum, with no hope, no purpose, no meaning to our lives, and nothing to celebrate at all.

"Jesus is Lord." What does it mean to believe it? What does it mean to live it? What does it mean to celebrate this revolution on a personal level, that is, on the level of our souls and bodies?

What's in a Name?

"You shall call His name Jesus," said the angel of the Lord to Joseph in a dream, "for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Now this was done, St. Matthew tells us, to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin would be with child and that she would bring forth a Son, and that His name would be called "Immanuel: God with us." Indeed, the very name "Jesus," the Greek form of the Hebrew "Joshua," means "Yahweh saves," or "Yahweh is my salvation." The name given to the one who led Israel out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land is the same name given to God in the flesh, for He would save His people from their sins.

Yet this second Joshua is no mere prophet or emissary from God. He is God Himself, come to save mankind. For while God used the first Joshua to save His people, God Himself as the second Joshua has come to save, for the angel said, "He will save His people." He is not the instrument of salvation, as was the first Joshua; He is Salvation. He is the Word made flesh, dwelling among us, full of grace and truth. "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:3, 4). "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

To believe that Jesus is Lord, then, is to confess that He is God. To believe anything else is to believe something less; and if Jesus is something less than God, no salvation is possible. Prophets and seers may predict; rabbis may teach. Only God can save. Our belief that Jesus saves means precisely that He is God.

All Have Fallen Short

To call upon the name—to believe in the name—of Jesus as Lord is to accept the fact that He has come to save mankind from sin, so that we might become the sons of God, having a relationship with God and becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Jesus did not come merely to grant sinful human beings a new status, a

"saved" status. Rather, as St. Athanasius wrote, "God became man, that man might become god." Thus, the forgiveness of sins opens a relationship with God in which we change: we become more like God.

St. John wrote, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8). God sees us already as sinners. Indeed, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Yet the lordship of Jesus Christ cannot become real in our lives until we begin to see ourselves as God sees us. We are frail, impotent, blind, lost, unable to save ourselves. Confession of sin before God is a statement of simple truth, but it takes the humility of the Publican to confess it. Without such humility, no soul can be saved.

If adoption as the sons of God, that is, salvation, is to have any meaning, we have to take seriously the sinfulness which precludes our sonship. That is, no matter how good we try to be, our "goodness" is insufficient. Or as the Apostle Paul put it, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do" (Romans 7:19). We are creatures. We are limited. We have fallen short. Our mortality is real and we will die.

To call Jesus Lord, we must confess our sins and begin to see ourselves as God sees us already.

What Then Shall We Do?

When the Apostle Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost, the men of Israel were pricked in their hearts. St. Peter had been preaching about Jesus, that He was the Christ of God and that they had crucified Him. Under conviction for their sin, they cried out to the Apostle, "What shall we do?"

Having come under God's judgment, having accepted responsibility for their transgression, the Jews were not content with mere lip service or even a public declaration and confession of guilt. Neither was Peter, nor the Church. Something had to be done to remove their transgressions from them. Confession of sin is just the beginning. "Repent," said the Apostle, "and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. . . . Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:38&ndash;40).

The response to Peter's sermon was overwhelming. Three thousand souls were added to the Church by baptism that same day. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). This was no simple "altar call." This was no mass rally culminating in a decision for Christ at the end of the service. This was and is how God has ordained for our sins to be forgiven personally, by our being added corporately to the Church. This baptism for the remission of sins is no mere "symbol." It conveys the forgiveness of sins, to the Jews first, but also to all whom God shall call. The gift of the Holy Spirit is no mere sentiment, but a sealing of the life which is to come.

Baptism is the door to Christ's lordship over us. We are baptized into His death, "that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. . . . Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Romans 6:4&ndash;6). Indeed, in baptism we confess Jesus as Lord and "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). To confess Jesus as Lord, we must be baptized.

And baptism is only part of the command, for the Apostle said, "Repent and be baptized." Without repentance, without turning from sin and embracing new life in Christ, our baptism does not affect our lives as it should. Life without repentance is like living on the porch of a mansion, refusing to enter the front door, which was opened through baptism. But when we repent, when we turn from the sin we have confessed and seek to live a new life, then we truly enter the mansion (the Church), for it is only in the community of the faithful that we can live the new life.

Being Added to the Church

Those who were baptized on the Day of Pentecost were added to the Church, continuing steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, not their own opinions. They continued as well in the Apostles' communion (koinonia), under the authority of those whom God had sent to proclaim the gospel to all men. They continued in the breaking of bread, the Eucharist. Their lives were marked by sharing the Lord's Supper, not as a memorial to a fallen leader, but as a victory celebration of the lordship of Christ, His triumph over death, known to them in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:35). They continued in "prayers," not merely some prayers, or their prayers, but the prayers, the corporate worship of the community. In short, they continued in the Church.

It was in the Church that believers heard from the Apostles what they themselves had heard and seen and looked upon, things which their own hands had handled concerning the Incarnate Word of life (1 John 1:1). This the Apostles declared, that the believers might have communion with them—the Apostles, for truly the Apostles' communion was with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3). This living relationship with and knowledge of God, in communion with the Apostles, is something which is made real in the Church, the great mystery whereby we become bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh (Ephesians 5:30&ndash;32).

Were it not for the Incarnation, there would have been no need for the Church at all. Because of it, however—because there has been this one, profound revolution in the history of man, as Sutea would say—the Church has become the essential sign, messenger, and declaration that what Christians proclaim to be true is in fact the Truth about Jesus Christ. Only because God took a body in the Incarnation to save the world can there be any meaning of the Church as the Body of Christ through which God still saves the world. Apart from that Body, there can be no assurance of the truth and knowledge which are necessary for salvation.

Hence, there is no New Testament evidence of salvation occurring outside of the Church, from the Day of Pentecost until the present. Contact with and incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church, by water and the Spirit, is the Apostles' doctrine, not our own. "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25&ndash;27).

Thus it is in the Church that Christ's lordship reigns, engrafting us into His divine life, even now on this earth. Here is where we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Here is where we truly say, "Jesus is Lord," as He sanctifies and cleanses us, as He makes us the glorious Church, His Bride. Here is where we feast on His Body and Blood, without which we cannot have eternal life in us (John 6:51&ndash;58). Here is where we give Him glory forever and ever (Ephesians 3:21). To confess Jesus as Lord is to continue in the Church.

Which Church?

When the Apostles first preached, it was easier to point to the Church and say, "Here it is." Over the centuries, and especially since the Renaissance, when man became the measure, not God, Western Christians have had great difficulty determining where the Church is and, consequently, who Jesus is. Many, in fact, have come to the conclusion that in spite of the Scriptures, the Church is unnecessary. It is especially ironic to hear people speak today of "only the Bible," when the Bible itself was the product of the life of that Church which had continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and communion, the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Yet the divergence of religious opinion today stands in sharp contrast to the life of the early Church, which proclaimed "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Many calling themselves Christians today do not continue steadfastly in apostolic doctrine or communion, the breaking of bread, or the prayers. The moral life of which the Scriptures and the Fathers speak extensively as the sign of the lordship of Christ has all but evaporated from many of the contemporary denominations.

The lordship of Jesus Christ requires that the Church be the Church: the historic Church, neither more the Church nor less the Church than in any other age. To proclaim Jesus as Lord is to uncover the wealth of apostolic teaching about the lordship of Christ and to continue faithfully therein. Our private opinions about the faith, the Scriptures, the Church, and her moral life mean nothing. To confess that Jesus is Lord means to repent and be baptized for the remission of our sins and to be added to the Church.

To confess that Jesus is Lord means to persevere under the godly authority of the successors to the Apostles, both our bishops and priests, for they watch for our souls and must give account (Hebrews 13:17). To claim to be under Jesus' reign but to reject the authorities which He has placed in the Church to rule over us is a contradiction.

To confess that Jesus is Lord means that the Eucharist must form the basis for our life in the world, else we shall not have Life within us (John 6:53). Sincere repentance, with regular confession to a spiritual father, must precede reception of the Holy Mysteries, lest we eat and drink condemnation, not discerning the Lord's Body (1 Corinthians 11:27&ndash;29).

To confess that Jesus is Lord means to continue in the prayers. We must become more and more a people of prayer, formally and corporately, and also personally and in secret. We must make time both to talk to God in prayer, and to listen to God speak His will for us.

To confess that Jesus is Lord means to yield up our souls and bodies as living sacrifices to Him (Romans 12:1). It means confessing that we are no longer our own, but His. For we have been bought with a price, the price of His own blood.

To confess that Jesus is Lord means to witness to His Lordship in the church to all mankind, going into all the world, making disciples, teaching all things whatsoever He has taught, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18&ndash;20).

To confess that Jesus is Lord, in short, means to proclaim in our lives and our lifestyles, with every breath that we breathe, this radical, revolutionary faith that God has taken flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth. Then, that is a revolution worth celebrating, always now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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