

**Sunday Sermon**  
**July 9, 2017**  
**“I Believe in Jesus Christ, God’s Only Son, Our Lord”**  
**Hebrews 1:1-4**

Introduction:

A pastor had a sudden death in his congregation, and the family scheduled the funeral so quickly he had no time to prepare. In a bind, he went to his computer and pulled up the funeral service he had used a few weeks earlier. Quickly he went to the “search and replace” function and had the computer put in the name of the newly deceased, “Edna,” as a replacement for the woman of the previous funeral, “Mary.”

Everything went fine in the service, that is, until they came to the Apostles’ Creed, wherein the minister led the congregation in confessing that Jesus was born of the Virgin Edna.<sup>1</sup>

We are looking at the Apostles’ Creed this summer, examining what we confess when we say the words. Next Sunday for Christmas in July, we will look at the part that says “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin *Mary*.” This week we consider the other parts that address the second person of the Trinity, “Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, Our Lord.”

More books have been written, more discussions have been held about Jesus than about anyone else in all of history. All kinds of titles have used for him: The Word-made-flesh, King of all kings, Lord of all lords, the Messiah, the Redeemer and Savior of the world, a miracle worker, a prophet, a reformer, a suffering servant, a teacher. And since the 5th century, Christians have used these words from the Apostles’ Creed: “Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord.”

I.

There are four affirmations here about the identity of Jesus:

(1) His given name is Jesus. Jesus is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “God saves.” That is why when the angel tells Joseph that Mary will conceive and bear a son, the angel says, “You are to call him Jesus, because he will save the people from their sins.”

(2) He is the Christ. Now let’s clarify: “Christ” is not Jesus’ last name. Jesus did not grow up in the “Christ” family. Christ is actually a title. To be precise, we should call him “Jesus the Christ.”

The word “Christ” comes from a Greek word that comes from a Hebrew word meaning “the anointed one.” In the Old Testament, priests, prophets, and kings were anointed as a sign that God had called them to their position for specific purposes. To call Jesus “the Christ” means that he is the one sent by God to bring salvation to the world.

(3) He is the only Son of the Creator. This word “only” tells us something

crucial about Jesus. He is unique and like no other, and to call him “God’s only Son” means that he shares the same essential nature as the Father. Jesus himself said, “I and the Father are one.”

(4) For believers, he is the Lord. The Greek word is *kurios*, and the basic meaning is “absolute ruler.” To call Jesus “Lord” means that he is sovereign over the entire universe, including every part of our lives. When we say Jesus is our Lord, we reject any other allegiance that would take supremacy in our lives.

In the first century, if you stood in a public place and declared, “Jesus is God!” no one would have been upset. But if you shouted, “Jesus is Lord!” you would have incited a riot.

You see, Rome did not persecute Christians because they believed in the deity of Jesus, or that Jesus was the promised Messiah, or that Jesus rose from the dead, or that Jesus was the only way to salvation. Those were “religious beliefs,” and they did not threaten the state.

But when Christians declared, “Jesus is our Lord!” that was a direct attack on the worship of Caesar as Lord. And that was punishable by death.<sup>2</sup> The same thing happened to Christians in Germany under Nazi rule. “Jesus is our Lord” is no idle statement. Those who have made that confession have been persecuted; they have been killed.

## II.

After these four titles, the Creed continues with a narrative about the incarnation of our Lord, “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.”

Some of you may notice a change here. We do not say “descended into hell”—rather, “descended to the dead.” For years, in the southern branch of the Presbyterian Church, the phrase “descended into hell” was left out altogether. Folks did not like the sound of it. But we believe that Jesus really did die, that he was dead for three days, and then on the third day was resurrected in victory over death. So the wording changed to “descended to the dead” in order to express our belief more clearly.

## III.

When our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate the Passover, they have a special way of confessing their faith. They narrate a list of all that God has done for them, and they sing or say a special word “Dayenu” after each listing. The word translates from the Hebrew “It would have been enough for us. It would have been sufficient.”

God brought the Hebrew people out of Egypt and slavery with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. “Dayenu.” Freedom would have been enough. But then God saved them again, overthrowing Pharaoh and his mighty army in the waters of

the sea. “Dayenu.” That would have been enough. But God did more. Not only did God deliver the people from slavery and not only did God overthrow Pharaoh and his army, but God gave the people water and manna and quail for food. “Dayenu.” It would have been enough. It would have been enough, but God did even more. The saving acts continued.

These words in the creed about Jesus are our “Dayenu” confession of praise for God’s saving acts. So let’s say it. The word is pronounced “die” as in what we celebrate Jesus did for us. Then “yeah,” as in hurray. And then “new,” as in the new life he brings. “Die Yeah New.”

Let me hear you say it: “Die Yeah New. It would have been enough.” This time with feeling: “Die Yeah New. It would have been enough.” This time like you mean it: “Die Yeah New. It would have been enough.”

If the Holy Spirit had only sent Jesus through the Virgin Mary to dwell among us, God in the flesh, what? “Dayenu. It would have been enough.”

If Jesus had only suffered under Pontius Pilate, allowing himself to be accused falsely, beaten, ridiculed on our behalf, what? “Dayenu. It would have been enough.”

If Jesus had only allowed himself to be crucified for us on a cross, suffering one of the most cruel and shameful of deaths, what? “Dayenu. It would have been enough.”

If Jesus had only been buried and descended to the dead for us, what? “Dayenu. It would have been enough.”

But Jesus did not stop. “On the third day he rose again,” breaking the power of sin and death through the triumph of resurrection and bringing to us new life . . . and that for us is more than enough.

#### Conclusion:

Saying we believe in Jesus is not just a matter of doing a “search and replace” with his name throughout the different parts of our lives. Saying we believe in Jesus means believing we have someone who will save us in all and despite all circumstances, someone we claim as Lord in all and despite all situations.

May we come to know in our hearts what we confess with our lips: Jesus is the one come to save us. He is the anointed of God. He and the Father are one. He is our Lord. Amen.

#### Notes

1. Adapted from John Ortberg, *Faith and Doubt*, Zondervan, 2008.
2. Ray Pritchard, “The Incomparable Christ: Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord,” sermon preached February 2004, from [www.keepbelieving.com](http://www.keepbelieving.com).