

When facing the great heresies of the first 5 centuries of Christianity, the bishops of the church's throughout the empire knew that anything less than what the New Testament affirms about Jesus as God our Saviour would be the greatest of disappointments with dire consequences. As the Apostle Paul put it in 1 Corinthians chapter 15,

14 .. if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people.

In accord with the Nicene Creed we want to be a church that affirms that:

For us all, and for our salvation he (Christ) came down from heaven (see John 3:16,17 for the New Testament expression of this truth).

Article II of the Anglican articles of faith confesses....

...one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile His Father to us...

(The full text of the 39 Articles of Religion can be found on our web site)

We see that **only Jesus can truly bridge** the gap between sinful human beings and the true and holy God. He is God incarnate, the eternal Son of God who has taken on human flesh, shed his blood for forgiveness of sins and has risen from the dead and ascended to an eternal standing with God the Father for us all.

Characteristics of the Church of the Son

A church that has a strong emphasis and confession of God the Son will have several important characteristics:

- An eagerness to tell others that God is truly with us in Christ
- A desire to go out with that good news to the ends of the earth
- A propensity for humble service and love for others, even enemies.
- Patience and forgiveness in the face of suffering and opposition
- A willingness to seek out and welcome the marginalized and outcast, even those profoundly different to our own culture
- Confidence that our prayers are heard by God
- True hope that life is not terminated here and now, but can be resurrected, and
- An offer of assurance to the displaced and disenfranchised that they can be one of God's children
- A strong sense of God's imminence due to the one who said, "I am with you always" and a sense of intimacy with God through the one who cries "Abba"
- A firm commitment to the preaching and teaching of the Scriptures and a strong belief in the authority of God's Word

Let's ask ourselves whether these are key features of our own faith, and of the faith of St. Michael's Church.

This paper was written by Rev. Steve Webster, St. Michael's North Carlton.



What we believe

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The Nicene Creed



The Son of God

The agreement that formulated the Nicene Creed came about in the 4th century AD because the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only Son of God was seriously questioned by certain religious teachers. In particular, a North African Church leader called Arius was famous for saying, "There was a time when the son [of God] was not".

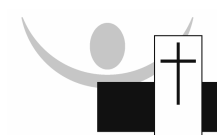
In every age and every nation there exists religious organizations and teachers that seek to present Jesus Christ as something less than the only begotten Son of God; something less than unique. According to those teachers, there could be any number of religious figures in history who could be alternatives to Jesus: co-contributors to our search for harmony with God, and equal pathways to God. This pluralistic ideology was not Arius' intention. Rather, Arius' view that Jesus Christ was a creature of a higher order than human beings, but not divine and not co-eternal with God the Father, is the thin end of the wedge for many other heresies about Christ. Arius and his followers were not willing to place the Son of God in the eternal Godhead before time, nor in the exalted position on high at the right hand of God the Father.

In our own time there are many who may say that Jesus was a good man, a great teacher, a healer, a prophet, a godly leader. Some might even say that he was one of many revelations of the true God.

The New Testament and Jesus' divinity

Ironically, in an attempt to defend the oneness of God, Arius limited God to his own reasoned boundaries, claiming that the Son could not really know God the Father. But the New Testament confounds this view. The Apostle John records Jesus himself as saying:

"The Father knows me and I know the Father" (Jn. 10:15).



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In John's Gospel again, chapter 5, we read

19 *[Jesus said]: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."*

The Apostle Paul states in Philippians 2:

5 *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

6 *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*

The New Testament clearly here, and in other texts, presents a oneness between Jesus of Nazareth and God. The Arian controversy caused the church to state this fact more plainly, saying that Jesus Christ is "the true and eternal God," "the One who is absolutely, genuinely God," "Deity," and "of one substance with the Father."

Arius believed that the Son of God was begotten, or brought forth from the Father at a certain point in time before the creation of the universe. In-so-doing he placed the Son of God in a subordinate role, not quite divine. It gave the idea that the Son was a creature, but of a higher order than human beings.

The opening words of John's Gospel critically refute Arius' claim:

1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

2 *He was with God in the beginning.*

3 *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

John 1:1-3

Creeds and Councils

The council of Nicea worded its great Creed to express truly what the Bible reveals, when it says Christ is "eternally begotten" – that is, always was, always is, and always will be coming forth from God the Father as His Son.

There is not enough space to scour the New Testament for the justification of the divine and eternal nature of Jesus Christ here, but a quote from someone who has may suffice. The great Gregory of Nazianz, Archbishop of Caesarea in the 4th Century put it beautifully when he wrote about Jesus Christ:

"He began His ministry by being hungry, yet He is the Bread of Life. Jesus ended His earthly ministry by being thirsty, yet He is the Living Water. Jesus was weary, yet He is our rest. Jesus paid tribute, yet He is the King. Jesus was accused of having a demon, yet He cast out demons. Jesus wept, yet He wipes away our tears. Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeemed the world. (payed our ransom) Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the Good Shepherd. Jesus died, yet by His death He destroyed the power of death.

[Gregory of Nazianzus, A.D. 381.](#)



The inimitable St. Augustine, in one of his sermons, put the case clearly:

"The Word of the Father, by whom all time was created, was made flesh and was born in time for us. He, without whose divine permission no day completes its course, wished to have one day for His human birth. In the bosom of His Father He existed before all the cycles of ages; born of an earthly mother, He entered upon the course of the years on this day.

The Maker of man became man that He, Ruler of the stars, might be nourished at the breast; that He, the Bread, might be hungry; that He, the Fountain, might thirst; that He, the Light, might sleep; that He, the Way, might be wearied by the journey; that He, the Truth, might be accused by false witnesses; that He, the Judge of the living and the dead, might be brought to trial by a mortal judge; that He, Justice, might be condemned by the unjust; that He, Discipline, might be scourged with whips; that He, the Foundation, might be suspended upon a cross; that Courage might be weakened; that Security might be wounded; that Life might die.

To endure these and similar indignities for us, to free us, unworthy creatures, He who existed as the Son of God before all ages, without a beginning, deigned to become the Son of Man in these recent years. He did this although He who submitted to such great evils for our sake had done no evil and although we, who were the recipients of so much good at His hands, had done nothing to merit these benefits."

[St. Augustine, Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons, Trans. Sister Mary Sarah Muldowney, R.S.M., Vol. 38 in The Fathers of the Church, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari \(New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc.\), p. 28.](#)



And so we, with those of old, still state with confidence in the Nicene Creed: **We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.**

The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) while not being able to penetrate the mystery of the divine and human natures of Christ, did offer four precautions that would protect the Christian from error when contemplating this mystery:

1. Attribute true and proper divinity to Christ.
2. Attribute true and proper humanity to Christ
3. Do not so mingle the human and divine that you end up with a being neither human nor divine.
4. Do not dissect Christ so that there are two persons in one being.

In summary then, if we study God's Word, listen to those who have studied the Scriptures and seek assurance from the Holy Spirit, we can declare that **Jesus Christ is the Son of God, fully God, and fully human.**

A Church that emphasises God the Son

A Church of God the Son would not underestimate Jesus Christ, and will need no alternatives. In the words of the late great Bishop Handley Moule (Handley Moule was Bishop of Durham from 1901-1920): "A saviour not quite God is a bridge broken at the farther side" (taken from *Principles of Theology*, W. Griffith Thomas, pg. 38). George Blackaby has said: "you will never be satisfied knowing about God..." *Leadership Magazine Quotes 1995*