

ILLUMINATIONS SESSION 3 – 20141021
NICENE CREED – OUR SYMBOL OF FAITH

NOTES:

“AND IN ONE LORD JESUS CHRIST”

The fundamental confession of Christians about their Master is this: Jesus Christ is Lord. It begins in the gospel when Jesus himself asks his disciples who they think that He is:

But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt 16:16).

Jesus is the Christ. This is the first act of faith which men must make about Him. At His birth, the child of Mary is given the name Jesus, which means literally Saviour (in Hebrew Joshua, the name also of Moses’ successor who crossed the Jordan River and led the chosen people into the promised land). “You will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (*Matt 1:21; Luke 1:31*). It is this Jesus who is the **Christ**, which means the **Anointed**, the **Messiah** of Israel. Jesus is the Messiah, the one promised to the world through Abraham and his children.

But who is the Messiah? This is the second question, one also asked by Christ in the gospels—this time not to his disciples, but to those who were taunting him and trying to catch him in his words. “Who is the Messiah?” he asked them, not because they could answer or really wished to know, but in order to silence them and to begin the inauguration of “the hour” for which he had come: the hour of the world’s salvation.

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question saying, “What do you think of the Christ (i.e., the Messiah)? Whose Son is he?”

They said to him, “The Son of David.”

He said to them, “How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand till I put thy enemies under thy feet” (Ps 110). If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?”

And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions (*Matt 22:41-46*).

Believing in “One Lord Jesus Christ” is the prime confession of faith for which the first Christians were willing to die. For it is the confession which claims the identity of Jesus with the Most High God.

“THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD”

Jesus is one with God as His only-begotten Son. This is the gospel proclamation formulated by the holy fathers of the Nicene Council in the following way:

... and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages: Light of Light. True God of True God. Begotten not made. Of one essence with the Father. Through whom all things were made...

These lines speak about the **Son of God**, also called the **Word** or *Logos* of God, before his birth in human flesh from the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem.

There is but one eternal Son of God. He is called the **Only-begotten**, which means the only one born of God the Father. **Begotten** as a word simply means born or generated.

The Son of God is born from the Father “before all ages”; that is, before creation, before the commencement of time. Time has its beginning in creation. God exists before time, in an eternally timeless existence without beginning or end.

Eternity as a word does not mean endless time. It means the condition of no time at all—no past or future, just a constant present. For God there is no past or future. For God, all is **now**.

In the eternal “now” of God, before the creation of the world, God the Father gave birth to his only-begotten Son in what can only be termed an eternal, timeless, always presently-existing generation. This means that although the Son is “begotten of the Father” and comes forth from the Father, his coming forth is eternal. Thus, there never was a “time” when there was no Son of God. This is specifically what the heretic Arius taught. It is the doctrine formally condemned by the first ecumenical council.

Although born of the Father and having his origin in Him, the only-begotten Son always existed, or rather more accurately always “exists” as uncreated, eternal and divine. Thus, the Gospel of St. John says:

In the beginning was the Word [the Logos-Son], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn 1:1)

As the eternally-born of God and always existing with the Father in the “timeless generation,” the Son is truly **“Light of Light, True God of True God.”** For God is Light and what is born of Him must be Light. And God is True God, and what is born of Him must be True God.

We know from the created order of things that what is born must be essentially the same as what gives birth. If one comes from the very being of another, one must be the very same thing. He cannot be essentially different. Thus, men give birth to men, and birds to birds, fish to fish, flowers to flowers.

If God, then, in the super-abundant fullness and perfection of His divine being gives birth to a Son, the Son must be the same as the Father in all things—except, of course, in the fact of his being the Son.

Thus, if the Father is divinely and eternally perfect, true, wise, good, loving, and all of the things that we know God is: “ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, ever-existing and eternally the same” (to quote this text of the Liturgy once more), then the Son must be all of these things as well. To think that what is born of God must be less than God, says one saint of the Church, is to dishonor to God.

The Son is **“begotten not made, of one essence with the Father.”** “Begotten not made” may also be put “born and not created.” Everything which exists besides God is created by Him: all things visible and invisible. But the Son of God is not a creature. He was not created by God or made by Him. He was born, begotten, generated from the very being and nature of the Father. It belongs to the very nature of God-to God as God—according to divine revelation as understood by the Orthodox, that God is an eternal Father by nature, and that He should always have with Him his eternal, uncreated Son.

It belongs to the very nature of God that He should be such a being if He is truly and perfectly divine. It belongs to God’s very divine nature that He should not be eternally alone in his divinity, but that His very being as Love and Goodness should naturally “overflow itself” and “reproduce itself” in the generation of a divine Son: the “Son of His Love” as the Apostle Paul has called him (*Col 1:13, inaccurately translated in English*).

Thus, there is an abyss drawn between the created and the uncreated, between God and everything else which God has made out of nothing. The Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, is not created. He was not made out of nothing. He was eternally begotten from the divine being of the Father. He belongs “on the side of God.”

Having been born and not made, the Son of God is what God is. The expression **of one essence** simply means this: what God the Father is, so also—is the Son of God. **Essence** is from the Latin word *esse* which means **to be**. The essence of a thing answers the question **What is it?** What the Father is, the Son is. The Father is divine, the Son is divine. The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal. The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated. The Father is God and the Son is God. This is what men confess when they say “the only-begotten Son of God... of one essence with the Father.”

Being always with the Father, the Son is also one life, one will, one power and one action with Him. Whatever the Father is, the Son is; and so whatever the Father does, the Son does as well.

The original act of God outside of His divine existence is the act of creation. The Father is creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in the act of creation, as—we confess in the Symbol of Faith, the Son is the one by **whom all things were made**.

“AND FOR US MEN AND FOR OUR SALVATION, CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN...”

The divine Son of God was born in human flesh for the salvation of the world. This is the central doctrine of the Orthodox Christian Faith; the entire life of Christians is built upon this fact.

The Symbol of Faith stresses that it is “for us men and for our salvation” that the Son of God has come. This is the most critical biblical doctrine, that “God so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (*Jn 3:16, quoted at each Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom at the center of the eucharistic prayer*). Because of his perfect love, God sent forth his Son into the world. God knew in the very act of creation that to have a world at all would require the incarnation of his Son in human flesh. Incarnation as a word means “enfleshment” in the sense of taking on the wholeness of human nature, body and soul.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as the only-begotten Son of the Father. And from his fullness have we all received grace upon grace” (Jn 1:14-16).

... came down from heaven...

The affirmation that the Son has “come down from heaven and was incarnate” does not mean that the Son is located somewhere “up there” in the universe and then descended onto the planet earth. That He came “down from heaven” is the Biblical way of saying that the Son of God came from the totally “other” divine existence of God, outside the bounds and limits of all space and time located within the created, physical universe. In general we must remember again the symbolical character of all of our words and affirmations about God.

The affirmation that the Son came “down from heaven” also should not be interpreted in the sense that before the incarnation the Son of God was totally absent from the world. The Son was always “in the world” for the “world was made through Him” (*Jn 1:10*). He was always present in the world for He is personally the life and the light of man (*1 Jn 4*).

As “created in the image and likeness of God,” every man—just by being a man—is already a reflection of the divine Son, who is Himself the uncreated image of God (*Col 1:15 ; Heb 1:3*). Thus, the Son, or Word, or Image, or Radiance of God, as He is called in Scriptures, was always “in the world” by being always present in every of his “created images,” not only as their creator, but also as the one whose very being all creatures are made to share and to reflect. Thus, in his incarnation, the Son comes personally to the world and becomes Himself a man. But even before the incarnation He was always in the world by the presence and power of his creative actions in his creatures, particularly in man.

Thus, before His personal birth of the Virgin Mary as the man Jesus, the divine Son and Word of God was in the world by His presence and action in creation, particularly in man. He was present and active; also in the theophanies to the Old Testament saints; and in the words of the law and the prophets, both oral and scriptural.