

WHY BAPTISTS BELIEVE WHAT BAPTISTS BELIEVE, PART 4

JESUS'S EARTHLY LIFE

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of everything that we as Baptists believe. We are “Christocentric” in our doctrine. What that means is that Jesus Christ is the central theme about which all theological positions or doctrines are oriented. I want to read a passage of scripture as we begin to talk about Jesus earthly life. This leads to the next question on your sheet. I want to read this passage out of John Chapter 17. The setting is at the end of Jesus’s ministry. In fact, it’s the night before His arrest. He’s gathered together with His disciples to celebrate the Passover. Jesus tells them that He is going away and that the Father is going to send the Holy Spirit. It is during this time of fellowship with His disciples that He spoke the words in this passage. It is what we call His “high priestly prayer.” Jesus is before His Father and His disciples are present. He’s praying for His disciples and for us as well (as His future followers). Jesus’s words in this prayer really give us a glimpse into where Jesus was before He came to the Earth...

“And now, Father, glorify Me in your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed” (John 17:5). *[Question 4]* Jesus tells us in this verse where He was before He came into our world. Where was He? He was **with His Father, in Heaven.**

Now for a real tough question... *[Question 5]* In Matthew Chapter 2 and Luke Chapter 2 you have the narrative of Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem. “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea...” (Matthew 2:1). “And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son...” (Luke 2:6). So then, how did Jesus arrive on planet Earth? The same way you and I arrived here. There was no spaceship

that came in and crashed landed in the Judean Hills and out popped Jesus. There wasn't some big epiphany and He appeared - "I'm here!" It was the whole Christmas story. Jesus came into our world as a newborn baby. He became "God with us." **He was physically born** into the world. That's what the Bible tells us. We celebrate that event every Christmas.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Matthew 1:18-23). Matthew sees that prophecy from Isaiah as applying to the virgin birth of Jesus.

[Question 6] So, who was Jesus' mother? **Mary**. The virgin Mary. She didn't remain a virgin because she would go on to have other children. But when she had Jesus, she WAS a virgin. How did she conceive Jesus? **by the Holy Spirit**. So, Jesus was human because He had an earthly mother and He was divine because He was conceived by God, the Holy Spirit. Based on what the Bible says, we Baptists believe that Jesus had both a human and a divine nature. He was both fully God and fully man as stated earlier.

Here's what the Baptist Faith and Message has to say about Jesus' conception: "In His incarnation [flesh] as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary."

The New Testament account of Jesus' life, the four Gospels, go from his birth and then skips over the next 30 years to the beginning of His public ministry. There is only the one account of Jesus in the temple when He was 12 years old (Luke 2). The Gospel writers were not concerned about the chronological biography of Jesus's life like you see in most biographies. They were more concerned with showing us WHO Jesus is and was, His character and His purpose than they were in giving a detailed chronological account of His life.

So, what does the Bible tell us about the character of Jesus? I'll let you tackle *[Question 7]* on your own. It mentions several of Jesus' character traits such as having a servant spirit, showing compassion, and His humility. This exercise is a reminder about the kind of person Jesus was.

JESUS'S CLAIMS

Before we get into exactly what Jesus claimed about Himself let me read a passage from Matthew Chapter 7. To set the stage for you, it is at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has been giving all this great teaching about how we are to live and about our relationship with God and others. He gets done teaching and we read this statement... "For He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:29).

[Question 8] So then, what is it that distinguished Jesus' teaching from the other religious teachers of His day? **He taught as one having authority.** And where did that authority come from? God the Father, right? Sure, Jesus did use effective illustrations to make His points. But that is not what distinguished His teaching. Yes, He had a dynamic personality. But that wasn't it either. He most certainly did make practical application for many of His teachings, especially when He was talking to His

disciples. But what made Jesus stand out from all the other religious teachers of His day was that He taught with authority.

The Baptist Faith and Message says this: “Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God [the Father].”

A lot of people, even those of other religions acknowledge that Jesus was a good teacher. OK, so what exactly did Jesus teach? In John Chapter 10 Jesus has this dialogue with the Jewish religious leaders. He makes this great statement that we all know and love: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29). We are doubly held by the Father’s hand and by Jesus’s hand! This passage here is one of the reasons we Baptists believe in eternal security. While we love this passage most people don’t realize that when Jesus says this, He is talking to the Jewish religious leaders. He’s talking to a group of people who don’t believe in Him!

Then Jesus adds this... “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). *[Question 9]* Here Jesus makes a bold claim about Himself and it was a claim that the Jewish leaders clearly understood. What was it? That He was **God**. Well, this didn’t go over very well with the Jewish religious leaders.

“The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone Me?’ The Jews answered Him, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone You but for blasphemy, because You, being a man, make Yourself God’” (John 10:31-33). Jesus’s claim to be God was a big problem that they had with Him. Jesus never once said, “Well, guys, I’m sorry that I gave you the wrong idea. I didn’t mean to

mislead you. What I meant to say was..." NO! Jesus stands by what they clearly understood Him to say, doesn't He?

Later, Jesus is with His disciples and telling them that He will soon be returning to Heaven to be with His Father. Thomas is confused, scratching his head. Poor Thomas! He asks Jesus a question - "Lord, we have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" And Jesus' reply to Thomas is a verse we all know and love... "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).

[Question 10] "I am the **way**, and the **truth**, and the **life**. No one comes to the Father except through **Me**." Jesus is on the way to the Father, on the way to heaven. So again, He's claiming to be God and He's claiming to be the way to salvation, to heaven, right? Isn't that what Jesus is claiming? He is saying to Thomas, "I am the way to heaven!"

In Mark Chapter 14 Jesus has yet another exchange with the Jewish religious leaders. This is after He's been arrested and He's in the process of being interrogated by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders. People are bringing all sorts of wild, false accusations against Jesus. "And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, 'Have You no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against You?' But He remained silent and made no answer. Again, the high priest asked Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' And the high priest tore his garments and said, 'What further witnesses do we need? You have heard His blasphemy. What is your decision?' And they all condemned Him as deserving death" (Mark 14:60-64).

[Question 11] When the Jewish high priest asked Jesus, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" In other words, "Are You

the Messiah?" How did Jesus respond to him? **C** - He said, "I am." Jesus never denies it! He never backs off of that. He never says, "Oh I'm sorry. I didn't mean to give you the wrong idea." NO! Jesus verbally states that He is God, that He is the way to heaven, and that He's the Promised Messiah. So then, was Jesus just a good moral teacher? No, He was much more than that.

Let me give you an illustration. Suppose that your grandson asked you to help him with his math homework. It's a pretty basic math course so you say "OK." He tells you that his teacher Mr. Wilson is a really good math teacher. He shows you a problem that Mr. Wilson had written on the board: A man has \$25. He earns \$30. How many dollars does he have? You write the equation out $25+30=$ __. Your grandson then tells you what he thinks the answer is... 85. "No, that's not right" you say. "Yes it is," your grandson argues. "I know because that's the right answer because Mr. Wilson said so!" And to prove it he shows you the photo he took on his cell phone from the classroom. And sure enough Mr. Wilson has written $25+30=85$. What would you conclude about Mr. Wilson, your grandson's math teacher? Well, I can tell you what you would not say about him. You would not say that he is a good teacher. I mean anyone who teaches an obvious untruth cannot be considered a good teacher, can they?

[Question 12] Using that same line of reasoning, let's look at Jesus and His claims. We just looked at a few of them. Suppose that Jesus really is NOT God, that he is NOT the way to heaven and that He is NOT the Messiah. If Jesus knew He was not what He claimed to be, then what would we conclude about Him? **He was a liar and a deceiver.**

[Question 13] Suppose that Jesus was sincerely wrong about what He said about being God and THE way and THE truth and THE life and being the Messiah. Suppose He sincerely believed all of these fantastic claims, even though they were not true. What would we conclude about Him then? **He was crazy, a lunatic.**

So, either Jesus was and is who He claimed to be - the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One - or He is a liar or He is a nut. You cannot believe that Jesus was a good moral teacher and at the same time reject His claims to be God. That makes absolutely no sense at all! So those people who say, "We believe Jesus was a great moral teacher but we reject Him as the Son of God" are way off. That is just stupid thinking. You cannot come to that conclusion about Jesus and then not believe Him.