

More than Just Another Nice Guy

Numbers 6:22-27

Psalm 67

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:16-21

What if you're right?
He was just another nice guy?
What if you're right?
What if it's true?
They say the cross would only make a fool of you.
What if it's true?
What if he takes the place in history
with all the prophets and the kings
who taught us love and came in peace
but then the story ends
What then?

But what if you're wrong?
What if there's more?
What if there's hope you've never dreamed of hoping for?...
What if he's more than you know?

-by Nichole Nordeman¹

As Nichole Nordeman's song points out, many people have portrayed Jesus as a great guy, who did a lot of great things and gave us a lot of great quotes, but nothing more. Some of you might even know people who think this way about Christ. It's not a new belief; actually, the belief that Jesus was "just another nice guy" was a heresy that the Church had to deal with centuries ago. In fact, our celebration today of the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, was part of the Church's approach to teaching the truth about Jesus' divinity.

In the fifth century, there were people in the Church who were heretically teaching that Jesus Christ was not divine, but only human. The Church leaders got together at the Council of Ephesus, in 431 A.D., and defended against this attack and reaffirmed that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine. One of ways the Church reaffirmed Jesus' divine identity at the Council was by giving Mary the title of "*Theotokos*," which is Greek for "God-bearer," or more commonly in English, the "Mother of God." As the heretical movement tried to minimize Jesus into "just another nice guy," the Church responded by reaffirming His divinity, in particular through His mother, Mary. Of course, by giving Mary the title of "Mother of God," the Church was not implying that Mary is divine, or that she existed before God the Father, or that she had given birth to God the Father, but rather, that she gave birth to Jesus Christ, who is *fully divine*.

The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, reminds us that Jesus is God and that His birth brought forth two important things that could have never been accomplished if He had been just "another nice guy." First, His Nativity opened up for us a way to know God the Father more intimately and, secondly, it led to our salvation.

¹ You can listen to the song at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrKuK-5DByg>

If Jesus was only human, we would not know the Father any more intimately than the people of the Old Testament. However, since Jesus is divine, we find in Him an intimate image of God the Father. Jesus explained this in the Gospel of John saying, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9b). This is confirmed in the letter to the Hebrews, which states, “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe, who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being” (Hebrews 1:1-3a).

In addition to showing us the Father, the divinity of Jesus has gained us salvation. The Old Testament is the history of humanity trying and failing to save itself. The sacrifices of goats, bulls and grain offerings failed to suffice for our sins. Only a *perfect* sacrifice—a sacrifice that was fully human and fully divine—could ever suffice. In the letter to the Hebrews, we read how Jesus was that perfect sacrifice, “When Christ came... he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer’s ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God” (Hebrews 9:11b-14). A simpler way of saying this is—“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

“What if there’s more? What if there’s hope you’ve never dreamed of hoping for?” Today, we celebrate the fact that there *is* more! That Jesus Christ is *fully divine*, the perfect image of God the Father and the perfect sacrifice for our salvation!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISE:

- ✚ Read through the following quote from the Council of Ephesus. Share with God in prayer how this quote reaffirms for you the divinity of Christ.

“We confess, then, our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, perfect God and perfect man, of a rational soul and a body, begotten before all ages from the Father in his Godhead, the same in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born of Mary the Virgin according to his humanity, one and the same consubstantial with the Father in Godhead and consubstantial with us in humanity, for a union of two natures took place. Therefore we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord. According to this understanding of the unconfused union, we confess the holy Virgin to be the Mother of God because God the Word took flesh and became man and from his very conception united to himself the temple he took from her” (Formula of Union [A.D. 431]).