

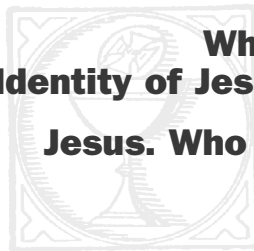
For the

LIFE of the WORLD

October 2004. Volume Seven, Number Four



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The Identity of Jesus in the New Testament**
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7 Jesus. Who is this Jesus? Jesus is...
By the Rev. Randall L. Golter, President, Rocky Mountain District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS)
Jesus, the Christ, true God and true man, the only-begotten Son of the Father, is the source of all spirituality. His blood erases and guarantees our sin-debt (Heb. 10:12-14), draws us near to God (Eph. 2:13), and brings holiness to the unholy (1 John 1:7b; John 17:17).

**10 Everybody Loves Jesus.
The Culture Cherishes a Counterfeit Christ**
By the Rev. Todd A. Wilken, St. Louis, Missouri, is the host of the nationally syndicated radio program, *Issues, Etc.*
Why does Jesus make the cover of *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and even *Popular Mechanics*? Why is He the subject of best-selling fiction and blockbuster movies? ... Everybody claims to know who Jesus was and what He would do. Everybody loves Jesus.

13 What Does This Mean?

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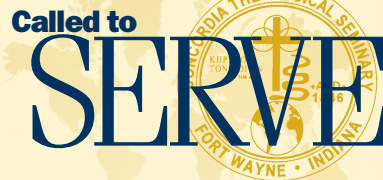
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“Who Do You S

The Identity of Jesus in t

By the Rev. Dr. Charles A. Gieschen

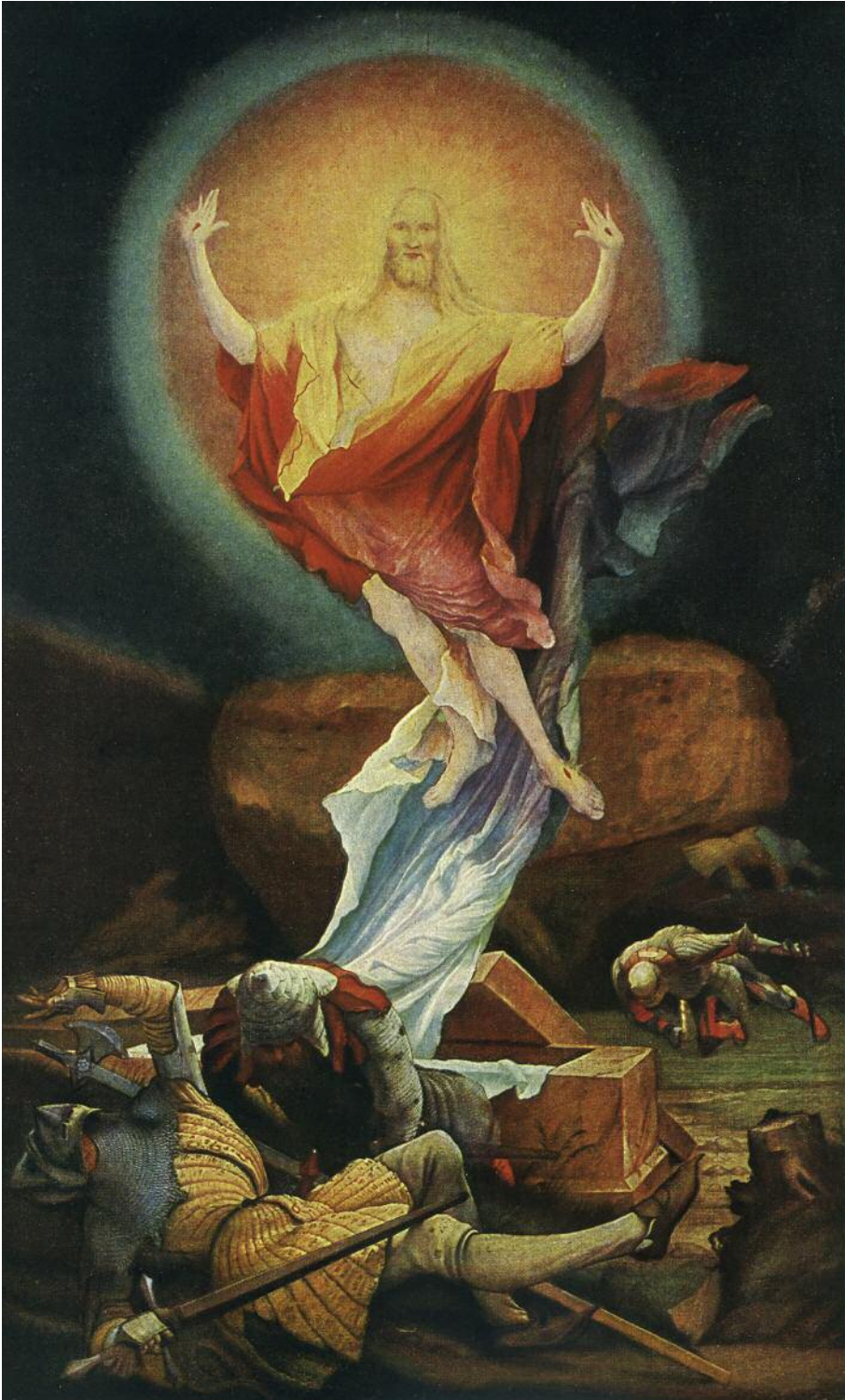
If Jesus were to pose to us His famous question “Who do men say that I am?”, He would receive a much more skeptical response than the one given by the first disciples (Matt. 16:13). It has become increasingly predictable over the past few decades that the media industry focuses its pens and cameras on Jesus primarily at Christmas and Easter. The content of these seasonal productions has also become unsurprising: feature articles in major magazines such as *Newsweek* or *Time* or two-hour TV network specials that cite “scholars” repudiating the testimony of the Gospel accounts concerning what Jesus said and did as well as who He is. Such productions have typically driven a wedge between what has been termed “the Christ of faith” and “the Jesus of history,” concluding that the New Testament tells us much about the former but very little about the latter. Between such productions have come books—best sellers like *The DaVinci Code* or learned college textbooks—which assert that the church “developed” Jesus into a deity over the course of decades, even centuries. This skepticism climaxed in the middle of the 20th century with the conclusion of some “scholars” that any quest for the so-called “Historical Jesus” was foolish since nothing can be known of Him with certainty beyond that He was a Jew who was crucified around A.D. 30! The release of Mel Gibson’s movie “The Passion of the Christ” on Ash Wednesday of 2004 broke this widespread pattern for the media industry’s presentation of Jesus, because it took the Gospel accounts of Jesus, especially the salvific significance of His death, very seriously.

In contrast to the befuddled understanding of Jesus’ identity often presented by modern media, the New Testament presents a clear and uncompromising confession of Jesus as God incarnate for the salvation of the world. This confession of Jesus is presented in two primary ways. First, it is revealed in *Jesus’ own words and work*. For example, the Gospel of John regularly records Jesus revealing Himself with the phrase “I am” (sometimes translated “It is I”), the same self-disclosure formula used by the LORD in the Old Testament (John 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:4-9; see also Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6). With these words Jesus shows Himself to be none other than “the LORD” who spoke through the prophets. Jesus also speaks regularly of

Himself as “the Son of Man”: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him has eternal life” (John 3:14-15). His use of this title is not like its use by some modern Christians as a designation for his human nature (e.g., the fourth stanza of the hymn “Beautiful Savior”). Jesus uses this title because it was a widely known title for the coming Messianic deliverer among first century Jews due to its presence in Daniel 7:13.

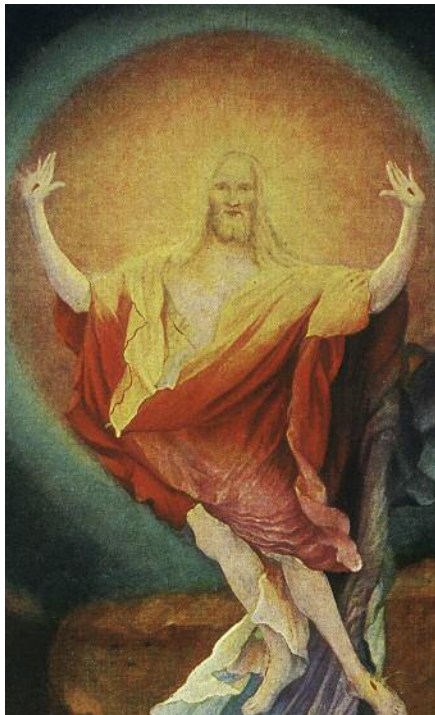
It is, however, especially *Jesus’ work* that reveals His identity. Jesus Himself emphasized this truth: “If I am not doing the works of My Father, then do not believe Me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe Me [i.e., My words], believe the works, that you know and understand that the Father is in Me and

ay that I Am?” he New Testament



Jesus was not a tragic victim in a corrupt political process that led to His humiliating crucifixion, but was the willing participant in a divine plan to redeem all creation from the bondage of sin: “The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep . . . No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord” (John 10:11, 18).

I am in the Father” (John 10:37-38). Too often Christians look especially to the healing and nature miracles in order to understand the identity of Jesus. As important as these are, Jesus routinely discouraged the propagation of “miracle news” during His ministry and instead repeatedly taught about the necessity of His death and resurrection as His definitive work: “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples



The New Testament documents proclaim that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the defining events which reveal who He truly is, even who God is. Jesus’ death and resurrection is not only vivid testimony to His identity as God and man, but it is the foundation of our identity as it proclaims God’s boundless love for all His creation, especially mankind.

that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Matt. 16:21; see also 17:22-23 and 20:17-19). Jesus was not a tragic victim in a corrupt political process that led to His humiliating crucifixion, but was the willing participant in a divine plan to redeem all creation from the bondage of sin: “The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep . . . No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord” (John 10:11, 18). Jesus’ definitive work, therefore, was His substitutionary suffering and death for the salvation of the world: “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for the masses” (Matt. 20:28). Jesus’ resurrection on the third day not only confirms His divine nature, but primarily testifies to the redemptive significance of His death: “Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for *our* trespasses and raised for *our* justification” (Rom. 4:24b-25; my emphasis). This deed demonstrates who Jesus is like nothing else He said or did. It tells us that He is God incarnate, abounding in undeserved love and compassion for His creation.

Second, this identity of Jesus as God crucified and risen for the salvation of the world is affirmed by *the words and worship of His followers*. The message that God had been crucified was foolishness to the Greek-speaking world, yet it took center-stage in the preaching of the apostles (1 Cor. 1:18-25). The presentation of Jesus in the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—is dominated by the narrative of His death and resurrection. The Apostle Paul shows this message to be the “creed” of first generation Christians: “For I handed over to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for

our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). It is specifically the Jesus who died and rose again that is confessed to be “Lord” (e.g., John 20:28 and Phil. 2:5-11). Not only did the apostles testify to Jesus’ identity through their words about Him but also in their worship of Jesus. The First Commandment testifies that worship of any being other than the LORD is idolatry. For first century Jews to worship Jesus as is evident in the New Testament, they truly believed that the fleshly Jesus is the LORD (e.g., John 9:38 and Matt. 28:17).

As we have seen from these brief examples, three important truths about the identity of Jesus surface repeatedly in the New Testament. First, these writings testify that *Jesus is Lord*; namely, He is none other than the LORD of the Old Testament, the God of Israel. He is not depicted merely as an agent or representative of the LORD but as one who shares in the mysterious reality of the true God by virtue of being the Son. He is Emmanuel, “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Second, the New Testament also proclaims that *Jesus is man*; namely, He is God incarnate as a flesh and blood male. He did not only appear to be man by temporarily taking the form of a man but eternally shares our human nature because it was necessary that He obey as our substitute, even unto offering His perfect flesh and blood as a complete payment for our sin. The Son becoming man is a great mystery; it cannot be rationally explained but is accepted by faith. Third, and most importantly, the New Testament documents proclaim that *the death and resurrection of Jesus are the defining events which reveal who He truly is, even who God is*. Jesus’ death and resurrection are not only vivid testimony to His identity as God and man, but it is the foundation of our identity as it proclaims God’s boundless love for all His creation, especially mankind.

Jesus followed up the first question to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi with a second, more important, question: “But who do *you* say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15; my emphasis). Enlightened by the Holy Spirit who joined us with Jesus Christ in Baptism and turns our ears to hear His voice in the Scriptures, we echo the apostolic confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16). The historical and true Jesus, for us, is not hidden *behind* the Scriptures but revealed *in* them for the eyes and ears of faith to see and hear. Nor need we go on a “quest” to find this Jesus, for He has found us in baptismal water and continues to assure us who He is by offering His crucified and risen flesh and blood at His table for the forgiveness of our sin.

Dr. Charles A. Gieschen is the Chairman of the Exegetical Department at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.