

Serious Stuff!

Proverbs 8^{1,22-31}; Psalm 104^{26-end}; Colossians 1¹⁵⁻²⁰; John 1¹⁻¹⁴

*Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things.
[Colossians 1²⁰]*

One of the conversations that strangers most often want to have is the one that says all religions are the same. There are similarities, but there isn't one single thing that is shared by all religions.

'We all believe in God' - no we don't: Buddhists don't believe in any god and Hinduism makes a god of anything.

'Love your neighbour' - not uniform at all: most religions look after their own as a matter of principle.

'We all share the same rules' - a myth: the first three commandments alienate most of the worlds' religions.

But principal amongst the differences between other faiths and Christianity is what Christians believe about Jesus - and with the reading from Paul and the reading from John this morning it isn't something that we can side-step or avoid.

The readings are amongst the richest in theological content - properly called Christology - of any, so we will limit ourselves to four aspects present in both the Epistle and the Gospel:

+ Pre-existence

John says **in the beginning was the Word** and Paul says **He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**

There is always the danger that we, close to Christmass as we are, get lulled into the rather comfortable idea that Jesus' life began when God imparted the embryo in Mary's womb or even at his birth. Yet Scripture is clear, Jesus was there before time and space began. The temptation is to make the existence of Jesus dependent on us believing in him but the reality is that our existence is entirely predicated on him.

+ Agent of Creation

John says **all things came into being through him** and Paul says **for in him all things in heaven and earth were created.**

When you read the Gospels and you discover the miracles of Jesus, it is simply nature responding to the voice that called it into being and the hand that shaped it. The distinctiveness here from all the other creation stories is summed up in Paul's declaration: **all things have been created through him and for him.** Only humans seems to have any difficulty in worshipping and obeying Jesus!

+ Divinity

John says **the Word was God** and goes on to say **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us** and Paul says **in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.**

Jesus isn't limited to be like us as humans at the Incarnation, but becomes the lens through which God comes a little more into focus. This is the point of difference between Christians and every other faith: to other faiths this is impossible and offensive, yet it is at the heart of what Christians hold to be essential.

+ Accepted in God

John says **to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God** and Paul says **through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through his blood on the cross.**

Because Jesus is who he is, his self-offering is effective in securing our forgiveness and our acceptance by God. Unless he had been who Scripture claims that he is he could not have accomplished this - and it isn't something we could do on our own.

Does it matter? Christians need to have confidence in what Christians believe. We never have to rude, but we should always be confident in what Scripture teaches and in what God has done for us in Jesus.

If you need to know how vital this is to us, just think what would be left if Christ was removed from Christianity!