



Why
I Am a Lutheran

Jesus at the Center

D a n i e l P r e u s

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INTRODUCTION

JESUS AT THE CENTER



And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8)

In the words of St. John’s Gospel and in the Book of Revelation, Jesus identifies Himself as the only true God, who came to earth to save His people. In John 1:14, Jesus says He “tabernacles” with us (the Greek word for “dwell” is the verb form of the noun that means “tent”). He is the God who dwells on earth in the human tent called flesh. In Revelation,

Jesus refers to Himself in the same words God says to Isaiah to describe Himself (Isaiah 41:4). Therefore, Jesus is the eternal one who always has been and always will be. With these words, Jesus proclaims that the entire revelation of God given to us in the Holy Scriptures was given so we might know Him.

Jesus uses the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (*alpha* and *omega*) to describe Himself. Thus Jesus announces that from Genesis to Revelation, from the first letter of Scripture to the last, God's Word witnesses to Him. When Jesus says to those who seek to kill Him, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me" (John 5:39), He meant more than that the Old Testament contains one or two passages that refer to Him. Rather, Jesus was stating that the Old Testament is all about Him. When the apostle John records in his Gospel that these things "are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31), his words apply not only to his Gospel but also to all of Holy Scripture. The Bible also talks about creation, sin, Israel's history, Jesus' miracles, and much more of value for Christians, but in the final

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analysis, the Scriptures were written so sinful people might come to know their Savior. The simple truth that the Scriptures reveal Jesus Christ, the Savior, requires emphasis, especially when pluralism (the acceptance of all points of view as being true, even if they contradict one another) calls into question the idea, even the possibility, of truth and, therefore, the relevance of any religion that claims to reveal truth. We also live in a time when vast multitudes no longer know what Christianity is. Because we live in a nation that has provided freedom for the preaching of the Gospel, we are tempted by any number of media preachers to view the Christian faith as a set of rules to shape good behavior that pleases God. And if Christianity is defined as something little different than other world religions, it is not surprising that people forsake it in vast numbers, especially in the United States.

In one sense, a major theme of the Bible and of Christianity is our conduct as human beings. But this does not mean that we are able to please God with our behavior. On the contrary, everything we learn in the Bible about our behavior reveals that we never will and never can measure up to the requirements of God's Law. Every one of us falls short. As St. Paul says: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). So it was before a single page of the Bible was written; so it is still today. Every one of us breaks God's Law and deserves His anger. King David writes: "God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see

if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all fallen away . . . there is none who does good, not even one” (Psalm 53:2–3).

In response to this tragic message of our inability to please Him, God reveals to us His love in the person of His Son. This message is the beating heart of Christianity. All the teachings of the Bible revolve around Jesus, its pulsating center, the Savior of the world. Because all of us are sinful and break God’s commands each day, we deserve nothing but God’s punishment for what we think, say, and do. But Christianity teaches that God loved the people of this world so much that He did not wish to punish us for our sinful thoughts, words, and acts. Instead, God the Father sent His Son to do what sinful people could not do. God the Son became a human being, was born of the Virgin Mary, and lived His entire life on earth so He could save sinful people and restore them to their heavenly Father. As our substitute, Jesus kept the Law perfectly for us, yet He was punished for the sins of the world, taking all our guilt on Himself and dying the death we deserved for the wrongs we had done. Because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, God forgives us and promises the gift of eternal life in heaven to everyone who believes in His Son.

This profound message of salvation in Christ is the Good News that all of Scripture brings to us. Centuries ago, Johann Gerhard, a Lutheran pastor and theologian, wrote that every word of the Bible is to be read as if it were printed

with ink that is the very blood of Jesus. God caused every single word of the Scriptures to be written with this objective in mind: to show us His Son, our Savior. By showing us Jesus, God brings us to faith in Him, and with faith comes life.

This book, therefore, is first and foremost a book about Jesus. He is the heart, the epicenter, of the Christian faith and the only hope for sinful people, for us. We sing about this hope in the words of Martin Luther's beautiful Christmas hymn:

“From heav’n above to earth I come
To bear good news to ev’ry home;
Glad tidings of great joy I bring,
Whereof I now will say and sing:

“To you this night is born a child
Of Mary, chosen virgin mild;
This little child, of lowly birth,
Shall be the joy of all the earth.

“This is the Christ, our God and Lord,
Who in all need shall aid afford;
He will Himself your Savior be
From all your sins to set you free.”¹

