LEGACY CHURCH

Jesus Christ

A Position Paper of Legacy Church

Introduction

Every question the Christian faith must answer eventually leads back to one person: Jesus of Nazareth. Who He is and what He accomplished are not peripheral concerns. They are the center. The gospel stands or falls on the identity and work of Christ. If He is not who Scripture claims He is, there is no salvation to proclaim. If His resurrection did not happen, Paul says plainly, our faith is futile and we are still in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17).

The church has always known this. From its earliest days it has faced pressure, both from without and within, to revise, reduce, or reimagine Jesus. Some have wanted a more human Jesus, stripped of divinity. Others have wanted a more divine Jesus, stripped of genuine humanity. Some have reduced Him to a moral teacher, a revolutionary figure, or a spiritual guide. Each of these represents a departure not only from orthodox doctrine but from the Jesus of the Gospels themselves.

This paper traces the church's historic confession of Jesus Christ, grounded in the Old Testament anticipation of His coming, clarified through centuries of theological controversy, and held with conviction by Legacy Church today. Our aim is not to construct a more palatable Jesus but to confess the Jesus of Scripture with clarity, gratitude, and wonder.

I

Old Testament Foundations

Jesus does not appear without preparation. The entire Old Testament moves toward Him. This is not a retroactive claim imposed on the text. It is the way Jesus Himself read it. On the road to Emmaus, He explained to His disciples "in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). The Old Testament is, at its heart, a story awaiting a resolution that only He can provide.

The Promise of a Redeemer

From the moment of the fall, Scripture begins to anticipate a deliverer. In Genesis 3:15, God speaks to the serpent of one who will come, the seed of the woman, who will crush the serpent's head though His heel is struck. This is the first whisper of the gospel, and it sets the entire biblical narrative on a trajectory toward Christ. The enemy will wound the Redeemer. But the Redeemer will destroy the enemy.

This promise is progressively sharpened. God promises Abraham that through his offspring all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Genesis 22:18). He promises David a son whose kingdom will have no end (2 Samuel 7:12-13). Each covenant narrows the promise, bringing into focus the One who is coming.

The Prophets Anticipate Him

The prophetic witness to Christ is not vague or incidental. Isaiah 7:14 announces that a virgin will conceive and bear a son called Immanuel, God with us. Isaiah 9:6 declares that a child will be born whose name is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, and who will reign on David's throne forever. Isaiah 53, the great suffering servant passage, describes with stunning precision one who is wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and by whose stripes we are healed.

Micah 5:2 names Bethlehem as the birthplace of a ruler whose origins are "from of old, from ancient days," pointing to an eternal pre-existence. Zechariah 9:9 describes a king coming humbly, riding on a donkey. Psalm 22 opens with words of abandonment that Jesus will cry from the cross and closes with vindication that anticipates His resurrection. The psalms of David speak of a son who is also his Lord (Psalm 110:1), a phrase Jesus will later use to confound the Pharisees about His own identity.

The Old Testament does not contain a complete portrait of Christ. But it contains the sketch, and when He arrives, those with eyes to see recognize the fulfillment of everything the sketch was pointing toward.

Type and Shadow

Beyond direct prophecy, the Old Testament is filled with types and patterns that find their ultimate meaning in Jesus. The Passover lamb, whose blood spares the household from judgment, points to Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). The high priest who enters the Most Holy Place once a year with the blood of sacrifice points to Christ as the great high priest who enters once for all with His own blood (Hebrews 9:11-12). The bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness, which brought healing to all who looked upon it, points to Christ lifted up on the cross (John 3:14-15). The manna in the desert, the true bread from heaven, points to Jesus who declares Himself the bread of life (John 6:35). The tabernacle itself, the place where God dwells among His people, points to the Word made flesh who tabernacled among us (John 1:14).

In each case, the Old Testament institution is real and meaningful in its own right. But it is also incomplete. It points beyond itself to the One who fulfills what it was always only foreshadowing.

II

New Testament Understanding

When the New Testament opens, it does so with an announcement that something entirely new and entirely decisive has happened. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This sentence is perhaps the most theologically loaded in all of Scripture. The eternal Word, who was with God and was God from the beginning, has entered human history in a human body. The Creator has become creature. Not by ceasing to be God, but by taking on humanity in addition to His divinity.

Fully God

The New Testament's claim for Jesus' divinity is not subtle. John 1:1 declares that the Word was God. Colossians 1:15-17 describes Jesus as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation," through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together. Hebrews 1:3 calls Him "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." In Philippians 2:6, Paul says Jesus existed "in the form of God" and was equal with God before His incarnation. Thomas, confronted with the risen Christ, confesses "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28), and Jesus does not correct him.

Jesus Himself makes claims that no mere prophet or teacher would dare make. He forgives sins, which His opponents rightly recognize is something only God can do (Mark 2:5-7). He declares "before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58), using the divine name from Exodus 3:14 and claiming pre-existence before the patriarch. He accepts worship without redirecting it to the Father. He speaks not as the prophets, who said "thus says the Lord," but on His own authority: "You have heard it was said... but I say to you." The cumulative weight of His words and works leaves only a limited set of conclusions. He is either Lord, liar, or lunatic. The New Testament, and the church ever since, has confessed the first.

Fully Human

At the same time, the New Testament is equally insistent that Jesus is genuinely human. He is born of a woman (Galatians 4:4). He grows in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). He is hungry (Matthew 4:2), thirsty (John 19:28), and tired (John 4:6). He weeps at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). He is tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He suffers. He bleeds. He dies.

This is not incidental. The humanity of Jesus is not a costume He wears over His divinity. It is genuine. He is, as the church would later say, fully God and fully man, two natures in one person, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. His humanity is what makes Him capable of standing in our place. Only a man can represent humanity before God. Only God can bear the full weight of divine judgment and emerge victorious. Jesus is both.

The Virgin Birth

Jesus entered human history in a way unlike any other person before or since. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary (Matthew 1:18-23, Luke 1:26-38). This is not mythology borrowed from surrounding cultures but a unique, unrepeated historical event that serves a specific theological purpose. Because He was not conceived through the ordinary means of human generation, He was not born into the inherited guilt and corruption of Adam's line in the same way as every other human being. He entered humanity from outside it, taking on our nature without taking on our sin.

A Sinless Life

Jesus did not merely avoid sinful behavior. He was without sin in the deepest sense, free from any desire, inclination, or orientation toward what is wrong. He was tempted in every way as we are (Hebrews 4:15), which means the temptations He faced were real. They were not performances. He genuinely faced the lure of the world, the flesh, and the devil. And He triumphed over all of them, every time, without exception. This is not a trivial achievement. It is the prerequisite for everything that follows. Only a sinless sacrifice is acceptable. Only a sinless substitute can bear the guilt of others without adding to it.

The Atonement

The death of Jesus is not a tragedy with a happy ending. It is the central act of redemption in human history, planned before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8) and carried out with willing purpose. Jesus did not die because events spiraled out of control. He laid His life down (John 10:18). He went to the cross knowing what awaited Him and choosing it for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

What happened on the cross is the subject of sustained reflection throughout the New Testament. He bore our sins in His body (1 Peter 2:24). He became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). He is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2), meaning that in His death the righteous wrath of God against sin was fully and finally satisfied. Our punishment was taken. Our judgment was rendered. And the verdict was absorbed by the One who had done nothing to deserve it.

The Resurrection

On the third day, Jesus rose bodily from the dead. This is not a metaphor for the continuation of His memory or the survival of His movement. It is a historical event in which a dead body came back to life, transformed but physical, capable of eating fish (Luke 24:42-43) and showing the wounds of the crucifixion (John 20:27). Paul grounds the entire Christian faith in this event: "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). The resurrection is not an appendix to the gospel. It is the gospel's vindication. It declares that the Father accepted the Son's sacrifice, that death has been defeated, and that the age to come has broken into the present.

The Ascension and Intercession

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended bodily into heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father (Acts 1:9-11, Psalm 110:1). This is not a withdrawal from engagement with the world. It is the exaltation of the crucified and risen Lord to the position of supreme authority over all things (Ephesians 1:20-22). From that position He now intercedes for His people, serving as our great high priest who advocates before the Father on our behalf (Hebrews 7:25, Romans 8:34). He is not absent. He is reigning and interceding.

The Return

Jesus will return. This is not a hope the disciples invented to console themselves after the ascension. It is the explicit promise of Scripture, repeated by Jesus Himself (John 14:3), affirmed by the angels at the ascension (Acts 1:11), and celebrated throughout the New Testament as the consummation of all things. He will return visibly, bodily, and gloriously to judge the living and the dead, to raise the dead, to make all things new, and to establish His kingdom in fullness and forever (Revelation 19-22).

III

Early Church (First 300 Years)

No doctrine occupied the early church more intensely than the person of Jesus Christ. The questions were not academic. They were urgent. If Jesus is not truly God, He cannot save. If He is not truly human, He cannot represent us. The church's task was to articulate what it had always believed, worshiped, and proclaimed, with enough precision to guard against the errors that threatened to unravel it.

Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-108 AD)

writing on his way to martyrdom in Rome, is one of the earliest witnesses to a fully developed high Christology outside the New Testament itself. He insists that Jesus is both "of the race of David according to the flesh" and "Son of God by the will and power of God," "truly born of a virgin," who "truly suffered" and "truly rose from the dead." Ignatius is writing against Docetism, the early heresy that denied Christ's genuine humanity, insisting He only appeared to have a body. For Ignatius, this is not a philosophical error. It strikes at the heart of the gospel. If Christ did not truly suffer, there is no real atonement.

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202 AD)

developed what he called the doctrine of *recapitulation*. Christ, as the new Adam, sums up and reverses what the first Adam undid. "He became what we are," Irenaeus writes in *Against Heresies*, "that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself." This required genuine humanity. Jesus had to live the human life from beginning to end, facing every stage and every temptation, in order to reclaim what Adam lost and present to the Father a humanity renewed and restored. For Irenaeus, both the divinity and the humanity of Christ are non-negotiable, because both are required for salvation to be real.

Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296-373 AD)

stood almost alone for decades against the Arian heresy, which taught that the Son was the highest of created beings but not truly God. Athanasius saw immediately what was at stake. He articulated the principle with clarity: only God can save. If the Son is a creature, He cannot bear the infinite weight of human sin and divine judgment. He cannot bridge the infinite gap between Creator and creature. He cannot grant genuine participation in the divine life. Athanasius's most famous work, *On the Incarnation*, is a sustained argument that the Word became flesh precisely because nothing less than God could accomplish what needed to be accomplished.

His phrase, "He became what we are, so that we might become what He is," captures the heart of the incarnation's purpose. His decades of resistance, often in exile, preserved what the church had always believed and paved the way for the Council of Nicaea's decisive affirmation.

The Council of Nicaea (AD 325)

convened by the Emperor Constantine, formally condemned Arianism and affirmed that the Son is *homoousios*, of the same essence as the Father. This was not a novel invention but a precise articulation of what the church's worship had always assumed. The Nicene Creed, which emerged from this council and was refined at Constantinople in 381, remains to this day the most universally affirmed statement of Christian belief in history.

The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451)

addressed a later round of controversies. Nestorianism was perceived to divide Christ into two separate persons, a divine and a human. Eutychianism collapsed His two natures into one blended nature, neither fully divine nor fully human. Chalcedon defined the orthodox position with careful precision: Jesus Christ is one person in two natures, fully divine and fully human, each nature remaining complete and unaltered, the two natures united without confusion, change, division, or separation. This definition did not claim to fully explain the mystery of the incarnation. It drew guardrails around it, identifying the boundaries beyond which faithful Christology cannot go.

Together, Nicaea and Chalcedon gave the church the vocabulary it needed to confess what it had always believed: that Jesus is truly God and truly man, and that both are necessary for the gospel to be what the gospel claims to be.

IV

The Reformers

The Protestant Reformers did not revise the church's Christology. They assumed it, built upon it, and applied it with renewed pastoral and theological urgency. Their great contribution was not a new understanding of who Jesus is, but a recovery of what His person and work mean for the sinner standing before God.

Martin Luther's Christology was intensely personal and soteriological. He spoke of a "joyful exchange" in which Christ takes our sin and gives us His righteousness. For Luther, the doctrine of justification by faith alone depended entirely on the identity of Christ. If He is not fully God, His righteousness is not infinite. If He is not fully man, He cannot transfer that righteousness to us. Luther also emphasized what he called the *theology of the cross*, insisting that God is found not in glory and majesty as human philosophy expects, but in the suffering and shame of Calvary. The crucified Christ is where God chooses to be known.

John Calvin offered what remains one of the most enduring frameworks for understanding Jesus' work: the threefold office of *prophet*, *priest*, and *king*. As prophet, Jesus is the final and fullest revelation of God, the Word made flesh who declares the Father to us. As priest, He offers Himself as the atoning sacrifice and intercedes perpetually at the Father's right hand. As king, He reigns over His church and over all creation, and He will return to complete what His resurrection began. This framework, which Calvin developed in his *Institutes*, drew together the Old Testament offices and showed how Jesus fulfills each one perfectly and finally.

Both Reformers affirmed Chalcedonian Christology without reservation. For them, the two natures of Christ were not a philosophical puzzle but a pastoral lifeline. Because He is fully God, His atonement has infinite value. Because He is fully man, it has direct application to us. The same Christ who died for sinners now intercedes for them, and one day He will return for them.

V

Mainstream Western Christianity

Across the historic Christian traditions, Chalcedonian Christology has remained the non-negotiable foundation. Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the vast majority of Protestant traditions affirm that Jesus is fully God and fully man, that He rose bodily from the dead, and that He is the only mediator between God and humanity. On these points, the historic church speaks with a remarkably unified voice.

Where traditions diverge is not generally on the person of Christ but on certain aspects of His work. Roman Catholicism adds to the biblical account of Christ's mediation by including the intercession of Mary and the saints, and by teaching that the Mass is a re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice. Eastern Orthodoxy emphasizes the incarnation as the means by which humanity is united with the divine life through a process of *theosis* or deification. Protestant traditions, following the Reformers, ground salvation entirely in the finished, once-for-all work of Christ received through faith alone.

The more significant departures from orthodox Christology have come from movements that stand outside the mainstream of historic Christianity. Liberal Protestantism, emerging primarily in the nineteenth century, sought to make Jesus acceptable to modern sensibilities by stripping away the miraculous and presenting Him primarily as a moral exemplar and social reformer. Adolf von Harnack's influential lectures described Jesus' message as essentially about the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity, with little room for atonement, resurrection, or divine identity. This approach produced a Jesus that may be admirable, but cannot save.

Various cults and new religious movements have also proposed their own revisions. Jehovah's Witnesses deny the full divinity of Christ, teaching that He is a created being, the highest of God's creatures but not God Himself, effectively reviving Arianism. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that Jesus is a distinct, exalted being rather than the second person of the eternal Trinity. Oneness Pentecostalism denies the personal distinctions within the Godhead, teaching a modalism in which Jesus is the Father, Son, and Spirit simultaneously rather than the eternal Son. Each of these represents a departure from the Christ of Scripture and the Christ the church has always confessed.

At Legacy Church, we affirm without reservation the Christ of the Nicene and Chalcedonian definitions. Not because councils are infallible, but because these definitions faithfully articulate what Scripture teaches and what the gospel requires.

VI

Key Scriptures on Jesus Christ

> John 1:1, 14
>
> *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... 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."*

> Isaiah 53:5
>
> *"He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."*

> Colossians 1:15-17
>
> *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth... and in him all things hold together."*

> Hebrews 1:3
>
> *"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."*

> Hebrews 4:15
>
> *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

> 2 Corinthians 5:21
>
> *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

> 1 Corinthians 15:3-4
>
> *"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."*

> Philippians 2:6-8
>
> *"Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

> Revelation 1:17-18
>
> *"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."*

VII

Legacy Church Position

At Legacy Church, we confess Jesus Christ as the center of our faith, the foundation of our hope, and the one in whom all of God's purposes find their yes and amen. We do not merely admire Him or draw inspiration from His teaching. We worship Him, trust Him for our salvation, and await His return.

Uncreated and Eternal

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He was not created, not a lesser divine being, and not a man elevated to divine status. Before the world was made, He was. He is the Word who was with God and was God in the beginning, through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together.

Fully God and Fully Man

In the incarnation, the eternal Son took on genuine human nature without setting aside His divine nature. He is one person in two complete natures, divine and human, united without confusion or separation. This is not a philosophical compromise but a necessary truth. Only one who is truly God can bear infinite judgment. Only one who is truly human can stand as our representative. Jesus is both.

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

The virgin birth is not an optional embellishment to the Christmas story. It is a historically real and theologically necessary event. Jesus entered our humanity from outside it, taking on our nature without inheriting our corruption, so that He could be what we could never be on our own.

A Sinless Life

Jesus lived His entire human life without sin, in thought, word, or deed. He was tempted in every way as we are, and He overcame every temptation. His sinless life is not simply a moral achievement. It is the qualification that makes His sacrifice acceptable and His righteousness transferable to those who trust in Him.

The Perfect Sacrifice

Jesus willingly laid down His life as the perfect atoning sacrifice for sin. On the cross, the wrath of God due to us was absorbed by Him. Our punishment was taken, our judgment was rendered, and our debt was paid in full. This was not a tragedy. It was the willing act of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Bodily Risen from the Dead

On the third day, Jesus rose bodily from the dead, forever defeating sin and death. The resurrection is historical, physical, and decisive. It vindicates everything He claimed, validates everything He accomplished, and secures everything He promised. Because He lives, we will live also.

Ascended and Interceding

Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God in the place of supreme authority. From there He intercedes for His people, advocating before the Father as our great high priest. He is not distant or disengaged. He is reigning, and He is praying for us.

Coming Again

Jesus will return visibly, bodily, and gloriously to judge the living and the dead, to raise His people, and to establish His kingdom in righteousness and glory. This is not a hope deferred or a promise forgotten. It is the certain future toward which all of history is moving.

He Is Enough

We do not add to Christ. We do not supplement His work with our own merit, our own rituals, or our own moral performance. He is the radiance of God's glory, the exact imprint of His nature, the Word made flesh, and He upholds all things by the word of His power. In Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. In Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. **He is not one way among many. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him.**

This conviction is not arrogance. It is the gospel. And it is the most generous thing we can offer to a world that is searching for a Savior, because the one it needs actually exists, and He is everything He claimed to be.

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