

## ***“Who Is This Man?”***

“Who is this man?” Who is this man Jesus? This is the most important question that has ever been asked. How will you answer it? The question comes up in the Holy Gospel for today, Matthew 16:13-20. Our text begins: “Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’”

Who is this man? Who is this Jesus? Jesus asks this question of his disciples—first, about what they have heard people saying about him: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Jesus often refers to himself as “the Son of Man.” Well, the disciples had been with Jesus for some time now, and they’ve been out among the people and heard what folks are saying. So they reply with the various opinions they have heard: “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

All interesting opinions, but all off the mark. Jesus’ bold preaching reminded people of the message John the Baptist preached. Could Jesus be John raised from the dead? Or what about Elijah? Certainly he was a fearless prophet, and a miracle-worker, too. Could Jesus be Elijah making an end-time visit? Or what about Jeremiah? He preached against the false worship going on at the temple at his time, and he suffered a lot of opposition for it. Sounds like Jesus. So these are points of similarity between Jesus and the prophets of the past. But all these speculations and opinions underestimate who Jesus really is. And this sort of “low-balling” of Jesus is still going on in our day.

There are lots of “false identities” of who Jesus really is out there today. For example, some people think of Jesus as a Cheerleader “with pom-poms who encourages his followers in their pursuit of whatever makes them happy.” Or Jesus as a Good Teacher, “not the incarnate Divine Lord, and nothing more than a wise religious teacher.” Or Jesus the Teddy Bear, “a cuddly, safe, and tame, comfort toy for scary times.” But none of these are the real deal. Jesus is much more and much better than any of these popular misconceptions.

And then Jesus asks his disciples: **“But you—who do you say that I am?”** Simon Peter speaks up with the right answer: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Yes, that’s who Jesus is! Jesus, this Messiah, is the very Son of God, God incarnate, come in the flesh. Jesus tells Peter that he got the right answer. And this is foundational to the Christian church. Jesus goes on to say, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Peter’s confession will be the “rock,” on which Jesus will build his church. That is, the apostolic proclamation of the faith—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God—this will be the rock-solid foundation of the church for all time. And so it is.

“On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Hell is letting loose on the church in our day. Christians are being martyred in Nigeria, Sudan and the Middle East. Christians are being ostracized, oppressed and canceled here at home, and the church is under attack. But Jesus is watching out for his church. He is guarding his flock and purifying our faith, even in the fire of affliction. They cannot take our salvation away from us. Jesus has conquered death and the devil and the hordes of hell by his victorious death and resurrection. Jesus is determined to build his church and to care for his church until the end of time. “And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

And that’s why we gather for worship each Sunday. We hear over and over again the good news, we believe, and we rejoice. We rejoice to answer the question, **“Who is this man? “ This Jesus—He is the Christ, the Son of the living God!** We have life in his name! This Jesus is our Savior! This Jesus died and rose again and lives forever, for me and for you! And because he lives, we will live too. Forever.”

*Who is this Man  
Who does the things no other can?  
He is the Christ,  
The sacrifice,  
God’s only Son come from above—  
Now we can see that God is love.*