

Christ Our Prophet
Acts 10:34-44

During the Christmas season, we remember the birth of Christ, the fact of the incarnation. We meditate on the mystery of how Jesus could be both God and man at the same time. We wonder at how the infinite God could take on human flesh. But Jesus didn't just come to amaze us by being God with us. He also came to do equally amazing things for us.

But how can we understand the infinite work of an infinite God? Theologians often speak of Christ's three offices, the three great purposes that He accomplished. And so, over the next three weeks as we meditate on His incarnation, we'll look at each of these three offices in turn. We'll examine how Jesus acts as our prophet, our priest, and our King.

In the first place, Jesus is a prophet. But what exactly does that mean? First and foremost, a prophet is a messenger of God. If you open up any of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, those books that lie between the Song of Solomon and the New Testament, one of the most common phrases that you will find is, "Thus says the Lord." Over and over again, God told the prophets things that He wanted them to tell other people, or things that He wanted them to write down. And so we see that above all else, a prophet speaks a Word from the Lord.

And according to our passage today, Jesus is no exception to that rule. Verse 36 says that God sent a message to the people of Israel through Jesus Christ, and that this message was good news of peace. That's what Jesus came to tell us: that even though we human beings have continued to be in rebellion against God from the time of Adam until the present day, in Jesus Christ God comes to us, offering us a chance to be at peace with Him, a chance to surrender to Him, a chance to come back into God's good graces and to be forgiven from all the things we have done to displease Him.

Now, perhaps that doesn't sound like such good news to you. Perhaps you don't think you've really done anything wrong, at least, nothing bad enough to become an enemy of God. Perhaps you think you're a pretty good person at heart – oh maybe you admit that you might need a little cleaning up around the edges. Maybe you acknowledge that you need to work on a bad habit here and there, but you certainly don't consider yourself a rebel against God.

But that's another reason that we need to hear the words of the prophet Jesus. For if prophets speak words from God, as a result they also speak words of truth. A real prophet never lies. He always tells the truth, and so you can always trust what he says.

This stands in stark contrast to the devil, whom Peter mentions in verse 38. For Satan is, at root, a liar. He deceived Eve back in the Garden of Eden, and he still specializes in deceiving people today. It is because of Satan's lies that we all too often fail to realize that we are sinners – for he encourages us to lie to ourselves. It is because of Satan's lies that we rationalize away the sinful things we do, making excuses even when we live our lives as though our Creator doesn't matter, even when we do hurtful things to ourselves or to others.

And one of Satan's biggest lies in this modern age is the statement that there is, in fact, no real truth. Instead, Satan wants us to believe that all truth is relative – that what is true for you may not be true for me. Satan wants us to believe this so that we won't

take the claims of Christ seriously, so that we will dismiss the Word of God as just another story book, or just another fantasy, or just another set of archaic rules that someone is trying to force us to live by.

So, why might people want to believe Satan's lies? Why is relative truth so attractive to so many? Well, perhaps most obviously, if there were no absolute truth, then no one would have to worry about doing the hard work of holy living, trying to live up to the standards of behavior in the Bible – standards like loving our enemies and doing good to those who persecute us, and praying for those who are spiteful and mean. If there were no absolute truth, we could just dismiss all this Scripture stuff as merely what some random people thought about proper behavior more than 2000 years ago.

Yes, if truth were relative, we wouldn't have to try to figure out what's right and what's wrong – we could just do whatever feels good to us at the time. If we were to believe, as many people do, that there isn't after all any reality to the ideas of right and wrong, we could let ourselves go, allowing ourselves to give in to our lowest instincts. For when you get right down to it, a belief in relative truth allows its devotees to be as lazy with their thinking as they often are with their actions. Might that be attractive?

But there's another reason folks might want to reject the Scripture's claim to be absolutely true. For if there were no one standard of right and wrong, it would make it a lot easier for us to live in our all too fragmented world, wouldn't it? Over the TV and the internet, in movies and music, at church and at work we are confronted with equally sincere people saying that totally conflicting things are true. We live in a world where many people whom we love live in fundamental disagreement, in a country of red counties and blue counties, in an America that is increasingly politically polarized between black and white, urban and rural.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could just live and let live? Wouldn't it be more convenient just to let folks believe whatever they want to? Wouldn't it be easier just to relax into relativism, calling the very existence of truth into question?

But Jesus the prophet will have none of this. Instead, He came to shine the light of truth into the darkness in which all these lies prefer to hide. And He shined that light on us not just with the persuasiveness of His Words. No, Jesus came to demonstrate the reality of the truth most clearly through the power of His deeds. Peter talks in verse 38 of how Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, healed people who were in bondage to sickness and to demon possession. And verse 39 makes it plain that there were hundreds of people who witnessed these things. In other words, we know that what Jesus said is true not least because of the miraculous things He did.

Now, if we want to cling to relativism, if we want to hold onto a mistaken belief that Jesus was just another man with his own opinions, we might want to accuse those who recorded the miracles of Christ as being guilty of bias. But that won't do – for it was precisely Jesus' displays of amazing power that posed the greatest threat to His enemies. It was because the Pharisees and scribes could not simply dismiss Jesus as a crank or a fool that they plotted against Him. It was because they couldn't deny the power of Jesus that they convinced the Roman governor to nail Him to a cross and leave Him there to die.

But even in His death Jesus the prophet proved that all He had done and all He had said had been true. For Jesus had told His disciples time after time that he would be put to death. Oh, they didn't believe Him when He told them about His upcoming

execution – they didn't want to believe Him. But as they saw Him take His last breaths on the cross, they could no longer deny the truth of His words. They couldn't deny that He was a true prophet.

But there was one other thing that Jesus the prophet had said. He had told His disciples that He would rise from the dead on the third day. They didn't believe that either, until Peter went on Easter morning and gazed into the empty tomb. And then he still didn't believe Jesus was risen until Jesus came and stood right in front of Peter and showed him the places where the nails had pierced His hands and feet. Then Peter knew: he knew the truth and the power of God, as the Great Prophet of God had revealed them to him. Standing in the presence of the Christ Who was and is the greatest witness of the might and mercy of God, Peter had no more room for doubting. The light of truth had fully and finally driven the darkness and the lies of sin away.

That's why Peter came to the house of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10 to tell this group of Gentiles about what he had seen and heard. Peter came to tell these people not just some things he had dreamed up in his own imagination, but the truth, the gospel truth brought from Heaven by Jesus the Great Prophet. Peter came to tell these Gentiles the truth because Jesus had commissioned Peter to be a prophet as well, to carry the truth into a dark and doubting world. And today, the same words, the words from the prophet Peter that came from the Prophet Jesus that came from the very heart of God – these words come to you. Thus says the Lord: “everyone who believes in, who trusts in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

That's the truth. That's the good news. There is nothing you need to say or do to make God love you any more, to make God welcome you any more sincerely, to make God yearn for you any more tenderly. There is nothing you can say or do to earn the forgiveness that God offers to you in Jesus Christ – just trust Jesus to do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

Now, we'll find out more about what Jesus does for us next week when we examine His role as a priest. We'll see how Jesus' death on the cross paves the way for all of His people to enter the presence of God as those who are forgiven and freed.

But for today, for this week, let's focus on the absolute trustworthiness of Jesus the prophet, and the other prophets and apostles that He sent to bring us the good news. As we meditate on the incarnation of Christ, let's remember one of its fundamental lessons: that God is real, that everything God says is true, not least because Jesus Christ Himself is the Way and the Truth and the Life.

It is because Jesus is our Great Prophet that we can believe Him. We can rely on Him. We can stake our lives for all of eternity on Him, knowing that if we come to Him in trust, He will accept us just as He accepted those in the house of Cornelius. He will forgive us and make us His own. And that's the truth.