



“Christian”  
Luke 3:21-38

**Idea:** As a Christian there are distinct doctrines you must believe for your faith to be Christianity.

**Intro:** “I Believe” by Frankie Laine

I believe for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows  
I believe that somewhere in the darkest night a candle glows  
I believe for everyone who goes astray  
Someone will come to show the way  
I believe, I believe  
I believe above the storm the smallest prayer will still be heard  
I believe that someone in the great somewhere hears every word  
Every time I hear a newborn baby cry or touch a leaf or see the sky  
Then I know why I believe

These are the opening lyrics to a song called “I Believe.” It was written in 1953 and made popular by the Italian-American singer, Frankie Laine. It spent eighteen weeks at number one. Some of you know the song. It has a catchy tune. In fact, many churches have sung it over the years, which I do not understand. The song has literally nothing to do with Christ or the gospel. Instead, it speaks to the postmodern mindset, which Frankie Laine celebrated. After recording the song, he said, “It accomplished an awful lot because it said all the things that needed to be said in a prayer, yet it did not use any of the holy words (Lord, God, Him, His, Thine, Thou). It said it all, and it changed the whole spectrum of faith songs.”

This song and how people embraced it, clearly illustrates the postmodern era. “I believe.” In response to that, I want to ask, “What do you believe?” And, the postmodern answer is, “Well, I am not sure. I just believe.” It fits the lyrics. “I believe that somewhere in the darkest night a candle glows.” Wow! That is life changing. “I believe for everyone who goes astray someone will come to show the way.” Someone is going to find the person who is lost. We do not know who that person is, but we believe it is going to happen. It has nothing to do with God, Jesus, His Word, or redemption.

For us to understand why and how people would embrace this mindset, we need to go back to the period of modernism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the French philosopher René Descartes. He sat in his Dutch oven and came out of that Dutch oven with the phrase, “I think; therefore, I am.” With that statement, the Enlightenment was birthed. The philosophy of the Enlightenment basically said that man through his human reason can attain universal truth. He does not need the Word of God. He does not need God or a Savior. All he needs is his own mind. So, modernism was this concept whereby reason is God, and truth can be found through the reason of man’s mind. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, everything began to shift towards what is

called postmodernism. This philosophy essentially says, “There is no absolute truth.” Therefore, we have thrown God, Jesus, the Word of God, and everything else aside for our own human reason. This shift brought mankind to the place, where we are saying, “There is no absolute truth.” Since then, we have moved on to what is being called meta-modernism. This idea basically says, “You can make up your own truth.” In other words, what is true for you can be true for you, and everyone can have their own, different truth. Everyone is right. Of course, this does not make any sense, and fifty years ago, people would have called this idiocy. Today, however, we call it sophistication.

This shift in thinking, unfortunately, has not taken place just in the hearts and minds of secularists. It has happened in the church too. Today, there are Christians who are too embarrassed to stand up and be called Christians for two reasons. First, they do not want to offend other people. You have your truth, and I have my truth. They would rather offend God than offend their buddies. They act as if they are ashamed of the gospel and their decision to follow Christ. Second, they are terrified that if they do stand up and declare to be a follower of Christ, then someone is going to ask them to share what they believe. And, sadly, many Christians do not really know what they believe. They just believe. “I believe for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows.”

What do we believe? Christians are terrified of that question because we do not know what we believe. In the second half of Luke 3, we discover some distinct doctrines that I am convinced we must believe for our faith to be Christianity. There are distinct doctrines that we must reach out and embrace as believers and followers of Jesus Christ.

Read Luke 3:21-38.

**Inquiry:** John the Baptist is preaching and baptizing on the banks of the Jordan River. He is calling the people of Israel to repentance and to find forgiveness for their sins in God through the coming Messiah. One day, as John is preaching and baptizing, Jesus arrives and makes His way through the crowd down to the river. John has already told the people who wondered if he was the Christ that the Christ was coming. On this day, He arrived.

John had preached to the people there that day. Many of them listened and were brought under conviction because of their sin. They responded in faith to the Word and turned from their sin to God for forgiveness. Baptism was the outward expression of the inner change in their lives. After the people had been baptized that day, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him. He recognized Jesus as the Messiah and declared it to the crowd (John 1:29-31). Jesus came into the river and asked to receive baptism. John immediately tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized, recognizing His holiness. Jesus, however, said something puzzling, *“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”* (Matt 3:15).

Why would Jesus need to be baptized? Was He not already sinless and holy? Was John not declaring a baptism of repentance? Yes, Jesus was utterly righteous. Paul called Him our *“righteousness”* (1 Cor 1:30). He had fulfilled all manner of righteousness from His youth up – moral righteousness, legal righteousness, spiritual righteousness. He was sinless. As such, He had no need to undergo John’s baptism, but He did. The reason for Jesus being baptized was to identify with the righteous actions of His people. As the embodiment of righteousness, Jesus did not come to John to confess and repent of His own sins. He had none. He came to make Himself one with those who did submit to the rite in order to fulfill all that the Law required.

When John understood this, he consented. As the crowd stood there on the banks of the Jordan River and watched Jesus be baptized, it looked like all the other thousands of baptisms that had taken place. It was routine to them, but it was not at all routine from Heaven’s perspective. As Jesus was raised from the water, the heavens opened. God the Spirit descended like a dove on the God the Son, and God the Father thundered His approval from Heaven.

Luke's purpose in writing his Gospel was to give an "orderly account" of Jesus and His ministry. He wants Theophilus and his readers to know that Jesus is God and the Christ. This purpose is seen in how Luke moves from Jesus' baptism to His genealogy. In these verses, I want you to understand that as a Christian there are distinct doctrines you must believe for your faith to be Christianity. We do not believe in belief. Our faith is not in faith. It is in the God who has revealed Himself to us in the written and living Word of God (John 1:1, 14). Among the many doctrines described in the Bible, there are four things presented in these verses that we must believe if our faith is to be distinctively Christian.

We must understand the importance of...

## 1. Believing on Jesus as Lord and Savior

*Now when all the people were baptized... – Luke 3:21*

Last Sunday, we learned from the first half of Luke 3 that the people were baptized in response to the gospel message that John was preaching. He called them to repentance of sin, turning from sin and self and to the Savior. Baptism was the outward expression that they had confessed and repented of their sins. John was not satisfied with seeing people become more religious. He wanted lost sinners to find forgiveness and new life in the Messiah, and he wanted to see evidence of their new life in how they lived and treated others.

This transformation is indicative of the people's personal faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. John preached and pointed the people to the Messiah who would save them from the judgment on the sins. They believed on the Messiah. They did not just believe He was Lord and Savior. They believed on Him as Lord and Savior. They staked their lives and futures on Him.

Today, as we think about what it means to be Christian, to be a follower of Jesus we must believe on Him as Lord and Savior. He is our Creator and Master. He is the only One who can forgive and cleanse us from all our sin. It is not enough to religiously believe in God.

*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! – James 2:19*

The gospel calls us to turn from our sin and turn to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He alone rescues us from the domain of darkness and transfers us to the kingdom of light (Col 1:13). We must believe on Jesus. Have you believed on Jesus as Lord and Savior?

## 2. Believer's Baptism

*Now when all the people were baptized... – Luke 3:21*

Believer's baptism or water baptism that we see in the New Testament is always presented post-conversion. In other words, it is portrayed as one's expression of faith, which has been placed in Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is also an expression of repentance that has taken place. It symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the new life He gives to those who call upon Him in faith. For the believer, it symbolizes the death of the old life and a resurrection to new life. Often in the New Testament, baptism is presented as one's profession of faith. The Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 is a great example of this. He said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" They stopped the chariot and Philip baptized him.

Was the Ethiopian man converted through the act of baptism? The answer is no. He heard the gospel message from Philip and believed its message about Christ. His repentance and faith were publicly expressed in baptism. In the early church and in many places around the world, taking baptism carries a whole lot more weight than it does in Christianized America. For them, it signifies a clear breaking

away from their old life. It is a big deal because it is costly. The baptisms are public for all to see. You may lose family relationships, friends, employment, or even citizenship in the community. It requires contemplation and a critical decision.

In America today there are many “Christians” who may not think baptism is that big of a deal. Perhaps, they think that way because denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention stress so strongly that sinners are not saved through baptism. We like to mention how Jesus told the thief on the cross that he would be with Jesus that day in Paradise (Luke 23:43). It is important we stress that baptism is an expression rather than a mode of salvation. However, this stress does not undermine the importance of expressing faith in Jesus through baptism.

It is the model presented to us in the early church. When Peter preached at Pentecost, the people asked, “*What shall we do?*” The apostle answered, “*Repent and be baptized...*” (Acts 2:37-38). In essence he was saying, “Turn to Jesus in faith and repentance and express that symbolically through believer’s baptism.”

If you are in relationship with Jesus Christ, have you been baptized? Just in case you may not know; New Testament baptism involves the placing of a believer under the water.

### **3. Belief in the Trinity**

When Jesus was baptized the heavens opened. We do not know exactly all that was seen in that moment. Perhaps, the sky parted and opened a portal to another dimension, much like a Marvel movie, revealing an awesome glimpse of shining beings gliding about in God’s presence. What we do know is that John the Baptist saw it (John 1:32), and I believe everyone there that day saw it too. They witnessed God the Spirit, who is immaterial and blows where He wills like an unseen wind, take the form of a dove and descend upon God the Son. This anointing was followed by the voice of God the Father who thundered His approval of God the Son. In doing so, the Father cleared the air for those who questioned the legitimacy of Jesus’ beginnings. The declaration of God the Father connected the prophecies of Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42 to God the Son. He is retrospectively pleased because the Son has lived righteously for thirty years. He also prospectively pleased because He knows the Son’s suffering atonement will satisfy His wrath against sin.

We have before us a Trinitarian text. Here at Jesus’ baptism, all three Persons of the Godhead are present – Father, Son, and Spirit. Therefore, it stands in clear contrast against the theological errors some make when trying to understand the nature of God. Some people believe and teach that there is one God who takes different forms at different times. They say He is the Father in the Old Testament and the Son in the New Testament. Then at other times, God takes the form of the Spirit. They argue God exists in these modes. This theological position is called Modalistic Monarchianism or simply modalism. The fact that all three Persons are at once involved in this scene means that all three Persons coexist within the Godhead. They are not just modes of expression but Persons who express themselves.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the orthodox position of the Church. This belief is one thing that makes us Christian. We understand that all three Persons are involved in our salvation. The Father appoints our salvation. The Son accomplishes our salvation. And the Spirit applies our salvation. The Trinity is mystifying and beyond our full understanding. But then again, if finite man could fully comprehend infinite God, He would not be God.

Do you believe God is three-in-one? If we are Christian and believe the Bible, then we will understand the importance of believing that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three and one.

### **4. Belief in the Historical Jesus**

There are two genealogical records of Jesus' ancestry in the New Testament (Matt 1 and Luke 3), and the two are almost completely different from one another. Perhaps, the easiest difference to recognize is that Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph as the legal guardian of Jesus. Luke gives the genealogy of Mary, which would have been understandable in that day if she had no brothers. Mary's father Heli according to biblical tradition would have legally adopted Joseph as his own son and heir when Joseph married Mary.

Luke's genealogy is also different from Matthew's because it is given in reverse order. Luke began at the end and worked his way back to the beginning. He also went back further than Matthew. Luke's genealogy terminates in God. There is no parallel in the Old Testament or in rabbinic texts for a genealogy to begin or end with the name of God. Therefore, this unique characteristic ought to grab our attention.

Luke makes clear the historicity of Jesus. Why is this significant?

- Messianically, Jesus fulfilled every prophecy.  
He was not a charlatan who claimed to be the Messiah. The historical record allows us to lay His life and claims alongside the prophecies and determine that He was in fact very God of very God and the awaited Messiah.
- Salvifically, Jesus, as the Son of God, takes on Adam's flawed sonship and redeems it.  
He is the One, born of the woman (Gen 3:15), who would crush the head of the serpent. At the same time, He is the second Adam who perfectly keeps God's Word unlike the first Adam. Thereby, He is able to make atonement for all of humanity (Rom 5:17; 1 Cor 15:22, 45).
- Practically, Jesus is acquainted with our weaknesses.  
He has walked in our shoes and knows our struggles.

*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. – Hebrews 4:15*

Which Jesus do you believe in today? Do you believe in a mythical Jesus who makes a great story but cannot make a life great? Or, do you believe in a historical Jesus who lived and offered a perfect life as an atoning sacrifice to pay the penalty for your sin?

### **Conclusion:**

I believe for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows  
I believe that somewhere in the darkest night a candle glows  
I believe for everyone who goes astray  
Someone will come to show the way  
I believe, I believe

Do you believe? What or should I say, "Who do you believe in?" Christians do not believe in belief. Our faith is not in faith. It is in the God who has revealed Himself to us in the written and living Word of God (John 1:1, 14). We believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We express our faith through believer's baptism. We rest in the Trinity. And we glory in the fact that our God is historical rather than mythical.

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Have you received forgiveness in Christ? What would keep you from embracing the truth and believing on Jesus today? Do you need to follow the Lord in believer's baptism?