

## The GOSPEL in the IXΘΥΣ

Ever since the Incarnation of our Savior Jesus Christ, two symbols have dominated history as representations of our faith. The first is the cross. The second is a fish. More specifically, the Greek acrostic, IXΘΥΣ (ichthus), meaning, “Jesus Christ God Son Savior.” The acrostic spells “fish” in Greek, which to the Christian holds meaning in itself. The acrostic is often placed within a simple drawing of a fish, two arcs that meet at one end and cross at the other to create the fish head and tail respectively.



I want to use the acrostic, IXΘΥΣ, as a mnemonic as we walk through the Gospel. I will play around with the Greek letters in different ways.

### 1) I (iota)

Isn't it the case that too often we begin discussions with that small word? I. Especially when we enter the realm of philosophy and theology, we often begin with ourselves. We ask questions like, “Who am I?” or “What am I to do with my life?” It may be a natural tendency for us to seek identity, and they may be good questions, but in the end it may not be the right questions with which to begin. And when we seek to answer the question, “Who am I?” as an end to itself, we go astray in all sorts of embarrassing ways. Isaiah writes, “All we, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.” If we start by going the wrong way, we will end up at the wrong destination.

If the first question we ask is “Who am I?” then we end up going down the path of Adam and Eve, seeking identity apart from God. Rather the first question to ask is, “Who is God?” We soon discover that God is the I AM. God is the one who is. God is our reference point. Only through the great I AM do we discover our identity, for all that exists, all Creation, is sustained by the one who is.

### 2) X (chi)

Our very identity and existence is defined by the I AM. Juxtapose the I AM with our experiences as humans, and we know that there is something wrong. Deep down we feel the brokenness of Creation, of humanity, of ourselves. Whether it is disappointment with ourselves or the suffering that happens every day around the world, Creation is broken. I have yet to meet a person who believes the world should stay as it is, that the world cannot or should not be a better place. None of us can with a clear conscious check off Creation as if nothing is wrong. Our own judgment offers up a big X. Creation is broken.

What is God's response to a broken Creation? He so loved this world that he sent his Son to "unbreak" the world, to redeem it (John 3:16). Jesus enters into this broken world, and the world's response is to break him, crucifying him on the cross (John 1:9-11; Isaiah 53:5). In so doing, Jesus entered into the depths of Creation's brokenness, death and the grave (Philippians 2:8).

Though it seemed in the world itself reacting to God's Salvation with a big X that God was thwarted, it is in the brokenness of Jesus that Salvation springs forth. On the third day, Jesus in resurrection defeats death and the grave and makes a way for Creation to be redeemed. Jesus calls each of us to follow him in this salvific way of life. We are to repent from the brokenness in ourselves we call sin, lose our life in Christ, and in so doing discover eternal life.

### 3) Θ (theta)

God's plan of salvation is more expansive and wondrous than we can see or know, but we get a special glimpse into it by the way Jesus described it. The Gospel writers consistently chose to distill the good news Jesus preached in this way: **Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.** We Baptists are comfortable talking about repentance, but we pretty much get lost after that first word. Let us consider the good news of God's Kingdom coming to earth.

In Scripture, Creation is described in two parts, heaven and earth. Heaven is God's throne room, and earth is the realm of humans, created in God's image to be viceroys in caring over world (Genesis 1:27-28). There is a separation between heaven and earth, a veil that is rarely crossed. The Bible shares of times when God and angels cross this veil (Genesis 18; Exodus 3) and when humans cross this veil (2 Kings 2).

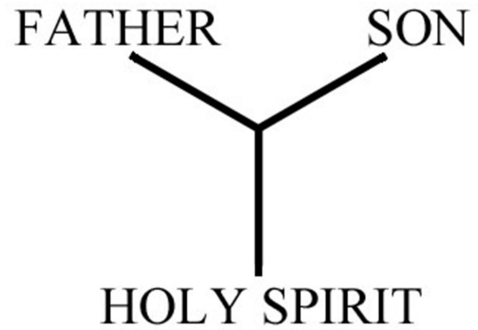
Then the Son of God passes through this veil and proclaims that which was hinted at in the Scriptures (Isaiah 65:17-25). The Kingdom of Heaven is coming to Earth! This dividing wall separating the two realms is dissolving. God is redeeming all of Creation, all of Heaven, all of Earth, and will one day resurrect them into a New Heaven and Earth (Revelation 21).



We as followers of the one who proclaimed the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth are to live as citizens of that Kingdom. We are now foreigners and exiles in this world, living holy lives among the kingdoms of the earth to testify to the fact that the world is fundamentally different because of the work of Jesus Christ.

#### 4) Y (upsilon)

To live holy lives is impossible. If you doubt this, read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). We are to be holy as God is holy. How are we to do this without help? The Good News continues now in the coming of the Holy Spirit! The Spirit of God, the same Spirit who participated in the creation of the world (Genesis 1:2), the same Spirit who rose Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11), is the same Spirit given to us on Pentecost (Acts 2). This Spirit, the first fruits of our inheritance in God's Kingdom, enables us to live as citizens of this Kingdom (Ephesians 1:13-14). Without this Spirit, we will live frustrated and discouraged Christian lives (1 Corinthians 2:11-16). The Holy Spirit is the Gospel as much as all we have covered thus far, and we must not shy away from sharing this good news with others!



#### 5) Σ (sigma)

We arrive at the last letter, a letter that in mathematics stands for summation. If you want to add a field of numbers together, you signify this with  $\Sigma$ . Our Christian walk is a continual discovery as to how the Gospel transforms and brings together every part of our lives. How does the Gospel transform my role as a child, parent, friend, co-worker, etc.? How does the Gospel transform my career? How does the Gospel transform my free time, my shopping habits, my diet, and so on? We must challenge ourselves with these questions daily, but especially when we gather on Sundays for worship, for Bible studies, and for prayer.

As God is bring all Creation together, so also is God bringing every part of our life together under the Lordship of Christ. The Good News does not end when we make a profession of faith. It is just the beginning! The Gospel is a lifelong journey of discovering all that God has in store for us as we walk with Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. At Mount Hermon, I pray we can proclaim and live the Gospel in every facet of our lives and in every way God has revealed it to us for the glory of God!

In Christ,  
Pastor Rich Goodier