



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York

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[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, February 20, 2011**  
*The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany*

*Choral Evensong*  
*at 4pm*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Canon John Andrew, *Rector Emeritus*

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*AND IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON OUR LORD*  
*(Apostles' Creed Series, Sermon 4)*

“Teaching the senators wisdom”. Well, this senator heard from his esteemed junior colleagues Michael a piece of wisdom after the first sermon in the series was preached by our learned Victor, the Theologian in Residence, who, Michael declared “had set the bar high.” High indeed. All I can do is to take a deep breath after Michael’s splendid high jump and hope to goodness I don’t bring the bar down on me.

You are looking at a Brit who is a passionate New Yorker who is a Royalist. Those of you who know me well know that I believe in Monarchy. My belief in Monarchy commands my mental assent and loyalty to the philosophy and the system. I strongly assent to it. It has won my acceptance of it.

But when I say I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord it’s not the same as my mental assent to a philosophy and a system. It means that the Church requires me to acknowledge that Jesus Christ his only Son my Lord and God is under my skin. Because of my Baptism into him I am tattooed with him; this tenacious stamp of Christ who has loved me since before worlds began, nurtured me, started up in me my conscience; fine-tuned my hearing to the calling of his priesthood, to a tiny share in it; racing through my veins, training me to look through his eyes, to inhale the breath of the Holy Spirit.

Trust St. Patrick to express it so sublimely:

“Christ be with me, Christ within me;

Christ behind me, Christ before me;

Christ beside me; Christ to win me;

Christ to comfort and restore me.”

(St. Patrick’s Breastplate: The Hymnal #370)

I believe in Jesus Christ. Not merely that. Christ, John tells us, declares that he is the only begotten Son. His only Son, Our Lord. That is what I mean when I recite this phrase in the Creed. Creeds were drawn up by early Councils of the Church Fathers meeting together to clarify core-truths of its understanding of the person and place of Christ in the Godhead. People cooked up theories about Christ, fanciful speculations based on the pagan philosophies which swirled around the chattering classes from the very earliest days. The first two terms of my Oxford Theology degree course were spent enumerating and differentiating the exaggerations of these speculative theorists. The early centuries were hotbeds of guesswork. Such was the fad and fashion to guess if Christ were somehow “adopted” in his maturity by God the Father or brought into the Godhead, that delivery-boys bringing the meat were supposed to have as the rap-music of that day the Greek ditty: [here Father Andrew spoke in Greek]— “There was a time when he wasn’t” God, that he was roped into Godhead. Well, if delivery boys could whistle and sing this, could you wonder what amateur philosophers and self-styled academics solemnly chewing the speculations over would come up with as they dined together?

It was not all idle, harmless, chatter, though. People got things badly wrong and tempers would fly. Verbal fights ended in enmity and accusations were hurled, and upholders of one theory would expel and condemn their philosophical opponents. The early Christian centuries were pock-marked with mutual excommunications and denunciations. Great names stand out, Athanasius; Arius, to name two opponents.

No. The Church’s agreed statement of her belief is that Christ is, God the Son, our Lord.

Our belief: not assent to a philosophy; it is the glad surrender to love which John in his Gospel knows and illustrates so starkly in his account of Thomas at Christ’s Resurrection-appearance (Jn 20:25; 27-9)

Thomas digs his toes in. His sheer, cussed, stubborn pessimism silences his colleagues with his grief. He is totally self-absorbed in it; insensitive to his Master’s pain as he proposes to poke around three-day-old nail-and spear-wounds. The Divine love floods the scene as Christ invites him to go ahead and do it. Recognition dawns. Belief comes in a torrent. “My Lord and my God!” Not intellectual assent. Surrender to love.

And how does John deal with his readers?

“...And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Lord, the Son of God.”