

JANUARY 2, 2026 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

I'd like to start with the blessing that you received yesterday at the beginning of the new year.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord let His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord turn His face to you and give us peace.

We definitely need peace, and as we come to the end of this jubilee year of hope, we hope that people will turn their swords, and their spears, and their ammunition into ploughshares, in order that we may have peace in this world.

Coming to our gospel today, we find the scribes and the Pharisees come to John and ask him, “Who are you? Are you Elijah? Are you the Messiah? Are you one of the prophets? Are you the one whom we are waiting to come?”

Now, John was well-known and John was renowned. He could have milked the situation, definitely say, “Yes, I am.” And he could've had all the glory and honour that he wanted, but John was a man of humility and John was a man of integrity. And so, he says “No. I am neither of any of these that you have mentioned. I am simply one who is a messenger who has come forth to proclaim that the Messiah is to come. He is more worthy than I am.”

“Who are you?” That is a question that will not answer— answer to John the Baptist, but also to Jesus. And through the ages, even until today, we ask ourself, “Who on earth is this Jesus Christ?” And it's not simply a theological debate or a mental w-- a, uh, work. It is something that has to touch us from the very depths of our hearts.

In the fourth century, there was a priest called Arius. He was born in Libya, worked in Egypt, and then came up to Turkey, which was really the heart of Christianity at that time, and he says, “Look. Jesus Christ is not God. Jesus Christ is the very first person that was created by God, the best of everybody, and he was the very first.”

And the council of Nicaea in 325 said, “You are making a great mistake and an error.” And they condemned Arius. They said “Jesus Christ is truly God and true man.” And that is a phrase that we use in the Nicene Creed. It's a creed that our friends, the south of the border, Americans, use every Sunday. Here in Canada, we use the Apostolic Creed, “I believe in God, the Father almighty...” But the whole crux of the matter was that this answer would carry on even until today.

When Jesus said, “Who do people say I am?”, Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus said to him, “You know, Peter, it is not you, but the spirit of God that has allowed you to answer that and to figure out what you are going to say.”

Who is Jesus Christ in your life and mine? If we are going to answer it not in a theological way, but in a face-to-face, an intimacy with Jesus Christ, then our whole lifestyle has to change. There has to be a “metanoia,” which is a “change of mind,” and also a “metacardia,” a “change of heart.” It means that I have to walk in the path of Jesus Christ, to be able to forgive, not seven times, but 77 times, to love as Jesus loved, to love those who hate me, to love those who speak ill about me, to pray for them. It doesn't mean to say I have to like them, because they are doing something wrong, but I've still got the duty to love them.

And if I say I'm a believer and don't do it, Saint John tells us in that letter, “You are a liar. You are a fraud and you are a charlatan.”

We are called in this manner. This is not a history lesson, but is a lesson that is a challenge to you and me, to live up to what we believe in our faith.

As we speak about John the Baptist, we hear those beautiful words of Jesus Christ. “There's no person born of a woman that is greater than John.” And John was simply a messenger. Jesus would say, “Anyone who believes in me is even greater than John.” So it's our challenge, my challenge and yours, that we can continue to do what John the Baptist did, to prepare the way of the Lord in our day and our time.

And the two people that did it lived in the fourth century, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus. Both of them were born after the Council of Nicaea that condemned Arius for saying “Jesus is not truly God.” And this Arian heresy carried on for decades after that.

Basil of the Great was born in Cappadocia, which in the Nevsehir in Turkey, the Nevsehir district in Turkey, and Gregory of Nazianzen was a classmate of his. They were great theologians. In fact, Gregory had such a spiritual insight, that he was simply called “The Theologian.” And both of them struggled very hard to make sure that Arianism wouldn't spread. In fact, they are considered to be the foundation of the trinitarian doctrine that you and I believe when we say, “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

But together with these two in Cappadocia, there was another Gregory, who was the brother of Basil the Great. These three were known as “Cappadocian fathers,” and they were the ones who laid the foundation of the faith of the churches in Turkey, from Ephesus to, um, to the churches in Colossae in Cappadocia, and along the coast, all the way up to Philippi.

They were born, as I said, after the Council of Nicaea, but they were so great that Gregory of Nazianzen was made the bishop of Constantinople, and Basil the Great was made the bishop of Cappadocia. And it was they that worked at the Council at Constantinople in 381. They're the ones that laid the foundation that you and I today, we do not have any problems about dealing with "Who is this Jesus Christ?" In those days, they had to figure out words, and language, and testimony. Today, we have got scriptures, scholars, theologians, who have articulated this in such a way that you and I don't have any problems.

But, finally, it comes to the idea that all the experience, and that is the Holy Spirit that gives us the grace to say, "Jesus is the Lord."

God bless you all.