

## Papanikolaou- Lesson 6

**Big Questions: What kind of Messiah (i.e. Savior) is Christ? How does he defy the expectations that the Jews had for their Messiah?**

### Key points

*Teachers should understand these few, key points before the lesson, and students should take these points away from the class.*

- A. Prior to the coming of Jesus, most Jews expected the Messiah to help them physically defeat their enemies by giving them more social and political power. They expected Christ to be more like Thor or a superhero.
- B. Instead, the Messiah ended up being a dead Jew on the cross.
- C. This doctrine was difficult for many Jews, and even many Christians, to accept because they thought the crucifixion suggested that God was not powerful.
- D. Many people found this idea scandalous, or troubling, because they thought that this proved God's lack of power.

### Review

Ask students:

1. What did we learn last class? Review your notes and rewrite a key point or takeaway that you found significant. If you were absent, your job is to review the student guide from last class and then ask your fellow students questions about the points they're about to share.

Give them 3 or so minutes to review and write, then ask them:

- Share what you've written (go around the room systematically to get feedback)
- Then ask students who were absent last class: do you have any questions they have about their points? Students may not be able to answer their questions, and that's okay. You can affirm the question, and if it's easy to answer yourself, do so. And if not, say "We'll hold on to that question to see if it's answered in any of the future classes."

Finally, review any key points from last class that were missed, especially if they are really important for this upcoming lesson.

### Opening Reflection

Say something like:

- In the last few sessions, we've learned about how living our faith in a Church community can help train us to grow closer to God.
- Today, we're going to start really exploring the person of Christ. Orthodox Christians claim Jesus Christ is a "Messiah" or "Savior."
- We're going to answer the big questions: What kind of Messiah is Christ? And how did he defy the expectations that the Jews had for their Messiah?

### Opening

Before we delve, let's look at some popular songs that are concerned with salvation:

I let it fall, my heart,  
And as it fell you rose to claim it  
It was dark and I was over  
Until you kissed my lips and you saved me  
My hands, they're strong  
But my knees were far too weak,  
To stand in your arms  
Without falling to your feet  
-- "Set Fire to the Rain" by Adele

'Cause you are the piece of me I wish I didn't need  
Chasing relentlessly, still fight and I don't know why  
If our love is tragedy, why are you my remedy?  
If our love's insanity, why are you my clarity?  
--- "Clarity" by Zedd

2. What do these songs have to do with the concept of salvation? Where do the voices behind these songs seem to seek their salvation? Do you find that people, maybe yourself, friends, family, or celebrities, seek salvation in similar way?

Explain to your students:

- Now we have to ask ourselves: when Christ came, what were the Jews, the ancestors of Christ whose struggles are explained in the Old Testament, expecting for a messiah, someone to save them?
- They were a religious minority, a persecuted people, and were often enslaved or running from slavery.
- The following Psalm describes what they expected in a Messiah.

Read Psalm 18:3-17 aloud in class. As students are reading, ask them to underline words that characterize the Lord.

### Psalm 18

<sup>3</sup> I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,  
and I am saved from my enemies.

<sup>4</sup> The cords of death encompassed me,  
the torrents of perdition assailed me;

<sup>5</sup> the cords of Sheol entangled me,  
the snares of death confronted me.

<sup>6</sup> In my distress I called upon the Lord;  
to my God I cried for help.

From his temple he heard my voice,  
and my cry to him reached his ears.

<sup>7</sup> Then the earth reeled and rocked;  
the foundations also of the mountains trembled  
and quaked, because he was angry.

<sup>8</sup> Smoke went up from his nostrils,  
and devouring fire from his mouth;  
glowing coals flamed forth from him.

<sup>9</sup> He bowed the heavens, and came down;  
thick darkness was under his feet.

<sup>10</sup> He rode on a cherub, and flew;  
he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind.

<sup>11</sup> He made darkness his covering around him,  
his canopy thick clouds dark with water.

<sup>12</sup> Out of the brightness before him  
there broke through his clouds  
hailstones and coals of fire.

<sup>13</sup> The Lord also thundered in the heavens,  
and the Most High uttered his voice,  
hailstones and coals of fire.

<sup>14</sup> And he sent out his arrows, and scattered them;  
he flashed forth lightnings, and routed them.

<sup>15</sup> Then the channels of the sea were seen,

and the foundations of the world were laid bare,  
at thy rebuke, O Lord,  
at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.

<sup>16</sup> He reached from on high, he took me,  
he drew me out of many waters.

<sup>17</sup> He delivered me from my strong enemy,  
and from those who hated me;  
for they were too mighty for me.

Discussion of Psalm:

- When were the Psalms written, before or after Christ?  
Many of the Psalms were written by King David. He was an ancestor of Christ.
3. How is God described in this Psalm? What phrases give you this impression?  
[very powerful, even frightful - “Smoke went up from his nostrils / and  
devouring Fire from his mouth”]
  4. Who or what do you think the enemies are in this Psalm?  
[Students may or may not know that the Jews were a persecuted religious  
minority. The “enemies” could refer to a list of powerful groups of people:  
Amalekites, the Philistines, the Persians, the Babylonians, etc.]

### **Preparing for Video Clip**

- Now let’s watch/listen as Dr. Papanikolaou tells us a little bit more about what the Jews expected from their God. Let’s listen as we try and think about how Christ fits in to the picture.
5. Dr. Papanikolaou says that we should never forget that Christ is:  
[The dead Jew on the cross]
  6. What do you think Dr. Papanikolaou means when he says that the Jews have a “Thor image” for the Messiah?  
[They thought he would a physically and politically powerful savior]

Review the answers.

## Reflection on Video Clip

Next, direct students to Matthew 5:43-48. Read this aloud in class.

Matthew 5:43-48: Love for enemies

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? <sup>48</sup> Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Discussion of Matthew 5:

7. Is this passage any different from the Psalm? Explain.
8. Does our understanding of God change when we consider Christ’s message?
9. If we are supposed to love our enemies, why do we still read Psalms like this one that emphasize deliverance from enemies?
  - For one, many Christians, especially in the Middle East, are under extreme persecution and prayers are necessary for their protection.
  - But also, we can see this word, “enemies,” in a metaphorical light. These enemies are temptations to stray from God and the influence of the evil one.
  - We are also praying for our deliverance from temptation.)

## Reflection

10. Why do you think God chose to defy the expectations of the Jews? How do you think our faith would be different if he gave them the power that they wanted?
11. Do you wish sometimes that God would fix things for you? Why do you think God allows us to struggle?
12. What’s the top point or insight you want to remember from this lesson?
13. Any final thoughts?

*Close with any of the key points that they might not have addressed in their own sharing/discussion.*

At this point, you may choose to hand out the “Key Points” summary page for this lesson.