

Rev. Janet Doyle
Christmas Eve 2021
December 24, 2021
Scripture: Luke 2: 1-20

Sermon: What Child Is This?

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpentry shop until he was thirty, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. When the tide of popular opinion turned against him, his friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies. He was tried and convicted. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never travelled more than two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompanies greatness. Yet all the armies that ever marched, and all the governments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, have not affected life upon this earth as powerfully as that One Solitary Life. (*"One Solitary Life," author unknown*).

In this marvelous Christmas passage, in the second chapter of Luke, we learn of the poverty of Christ. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit placed Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary. The Son of God was not born in a great palace. He was born in very poor conditions—in a stable. Philippians 2:7 says that Jesus, “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.”

“And this shall be a sign unto you; You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” (*Luke 2:12*)

A newborn baby, wrapped in strips of cloth, placed in a manger, a trough used to feed animals. Even these poor shepherds had never seen a baby placed in a feeding trough for cattle! “This shall be a sign unto you!” This was “the sign” not just “a sign”.

Commentary from Matthew Henry says, “When we saw him wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, we were tempted to say, “Surely this cannot be the Son of God.” But see his birth attended, as

it is here, with a choir of angels and we shall say, "Surely it can be no other than the Son of God." (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Henrickson, 1996 reprint, commentary on Luke 2:12*)

"Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing; Come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King. See with a manger laid Jesus, Lord of heav'n and earth! Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, With us sing our Savior's birth." (*Angels We Have Heard on High, French Carol 18th c*)

Jesus came down from the glory of Heaven to be born in a humble stable and placed in the hay.

2 Corinthians 8:9 says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich."

"Humiliation is the sign of majesty, the depth of lowliness, a witness of the height of glory. The cradle that was too poor for a child of man is fitted for the Son of God. (*The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary, note on Luke 2:12*)

"What child is this, who laid to rest, On Mary's lap is sleeping? Why lies He in such mean state Where ox and ass are feeding? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping? What Child Is This?" (*"What Child Is This? Hymn William C. Dix 1837-1898*)

John 1:10 says, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." Jesus created the world, yet when He was born as a baby, the world did not know Him as its Creator and Lord.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (*John 1:14*)

That is the incarnation; God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, was made flesh. He who made the world was born in a stable in Bethlehem. "The Word" is Jesus. Jesus "was with God" and "was God." He has always been with God and has always been God. Jesus was with God in the beginning.

“Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing; O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him; O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord. (“O Come, All Ye Faithful” translated by Frederick Oakeley, 1802-1880)

Jesus did not come the way they expected him. He did not come as a great King. He came as a little baby. Jesus was fully human and fully God.

“What Child Is This? This, This is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing: Haste, haste, to bring Him laud, The Babe, the son of Mary.” (“What Child Is This?” Hymn William C. Dix 1837-1898)

Centuries before, the prophets proclaimed that God would send a Messiah to save His people. Now, at long last, that Messiah has been born! And that Messiah is not a political king, as they expected, but instead is a Savior!

The baby in the manger did not grow up to be a man who simply healed a few hundred people, he did not grow up to be only a great teacher, Jesus is the Savior of the World, Emmanuel, God with us, to save us from our sins.

Our God is a God who loves to save. He will never turn away the desperate people who call upon Him. He changes those who call upon him and their lives are changed forever.

What Child Is This?

Jesus is Emmanuel—God with us. He is the baby in the manger; a real, human baby. What Child Is This? This Child is the Creator of the world. What Child Is This? This Child is the Savior, taking all the sins of his people upon himself so that the penalty is paid for all sins once and for all. What Child Is This? This Child is the Empowering Lord, living in the hearts of his people, empowering them to overcome the enemy and become like Christ. What Child Is This? He is the final judge and returning King, at his second coming. He will come creating a new heaven and a new earth for those who await his second coming.

What Child Is This? He is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. *(Isaiah 9)*

Today, each one of us has come to this Christmas Eve service for many different reasons. Perhaps you have come because you like to sing Christmas carols, or perhaps you have come because you realize that Christmas is more than just about the presents, the ribbons, the bows, the cards and the decorations. It is about the birth of Jesus, the Christ Child, so you want to honor and worship Jesus. Perhaps your heart has changed this season of Advent. We come for many reasons, but what I hope we can each take away from tonight, as we worship our Savior and light our candles is that it matters “what child is this” to you.

What does the birth of Jesus mean to your life? What will you do about Christmas every day of your life?

God rejoices when we gather to praise him and celebrate his Son’s birth, Jesus.

“Good Christian, fear: for sinners here the silent Word is pleading. Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you; hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the Son of Mary!” (*“What Child Is This?”* William C. Dix 1837-1898)