

What Child Is This?

My dear friends in Christ,

Merry Christmas! "He's only a child!" When we hear this phrase, what do we think of? We can think of great expectations being made of one who is too young to fulfill those expectations. We can think of a five year old boy given the keys to the car and expected to drive. As he sits on the seat, his legs are not long enough to reach the pedals. When he slides off the seat to reach the pedals, he is not tall enough to see out the window. The steering wheel is too big for him, and, no matter how hard he turns the wheel, he can't make it go one direction or another. Even if he were to get the car out on the road somehow, he wouldn't know the rules for driving, nor where he is going, nor how to get there. After all, he's only a child.

When you and I look in the manger, what do we see? In our Christmas Gospel, Luke leads us to see this humble child of lowly birth. He's not born in a king's palace nor in a rich man's home. He's not laid in a nice infant bed or even in a crib at a hotel. He's not surrounded by doctors and nurses monitoring his every need.

This child is born in a stable, perhaps no more than a cave, where animals, not people, are kept. This child is laid in a manger, from which the owner recently fed his animals. This child is attended to only by his parents. Later on, some shepherds drop by, but they are more suited for caring for sheep than attending to the needs of a new-born baby. Luke leads us to see this humble child of born in what each one of us would consider far from suitable. What can come of this child? Who is this child? Why does God's Word point us to the birth of this child?

Throughout this season we have been looking at a poem written in 1865 that become one of our most beloved Christmas carols. With the writer, we have been asking the question: "What child is this who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?"

We have looked at this child through the eyes of the shepherds who received the first birth announcement from angels, the wisemen who traveled great distances to worship this child as a king, his mother Mary, young yet faithful, and his stepfather Joseph who quietly cared for this child and gave him the name Jesus because an angel told him in a dream, "you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

What did others during his life on earth have to say about this child who grew into Jesus? As a child he amazed the teachers of the church with his wisdom and understanding. To the sick, lame, hungry, discarded, exploited, castaway he was a friend, healer, and sustainer. To many he was a teacher. To the church leaders of the his day he was a distraction, an irritant, a rabble-rouser, a menace, and a disruption to their way of life and business. To them he was an enemy.

And what about those to whom he was close? Who was he to them? What did he mean to them? Jesus asked his disciples that question once: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you," he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And yet this same Peter later denied even knowing his Lord and Master. Another disciple betrayed him into the hands of his enemies. And yet another needed to see proof of his rising from the dead. Even those close to him hadn't truly grasped who he was and why he came.

What does the rest of the Bible say about this child, “the Babe, the Son of Mary?” He is the Great I Am, the Alpha & Omega, the beginning and end, our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty, God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. He is the Word made flesh; Immanuel, God who is with us. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is our Good Shepherd, our Mediator, our Redeemer, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and our Risen Lord. He is the Light of the world, the Lord of all, the Chief Cornerstone, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is Jesus, the Babe, the Son of Mary.

But, the real question, the vital question, the life-changing question for us tonight is “Who is this child born in Bethlehem to us? This question is of greatest importance to each one of us here tonight. Politically, socially, economically, religiously and personally lines are being blurred, are definitions are becoming confused. And the sources of help offered by the world are artificial, deceptive, flawed, and temporary at best. Our culture is slowly removing all evidence of the Babe born in Bethlehem to the point where the celebration of this child has become nothing more than a happy holiday.

So, the answer to this question is literally a matter of life and death. “Who is this child born in Bethlehem to you? Is he someone you think about once or twice a year? Is he someone you approach only when there’s no other option?”

Thank God that the Word became flesh. Thank God that he camped in our midst for a while. Thank God that we have a Savior who endured the pains of death in our place. Thank God that this child was born to save us from our own sins. Thank God that he bore in his own body the punishment that we have deserved. Thank God that he has brought this salvation to our own hearts. Thank God that this little Child wants to be the King in your heart, that he awakens love in our hearts with his sacrifice on the cross. Thank God that God himself came to save you. Thank God this Christmas morning for this Child. Thank God for this Child, who is our eternal Creator. Thank God for this Child, who is Life itself. Thank God for this child, who is our divine Savior. Rejoice, you Christians, this Christmas morning! Rejoice loudly for the Word became flesh and camped out here for a while, so that we could enjoy with him heaven’s fair home! “Joy! Joy! For Christ is born! The Babe, the Son of Mary!” Amen.