

## Christmas Eve 2022 "What Child is This?"

### Introduction

In the year 1865, William Chatterton Dix, **PHOTO 1** who was a businessman in Glasgow, Scotland, suddenly came down with a serious illness. A near fatal illness robbed William of his strength and he was bedridden for many months. As he lay near death, William began to reflect upon the identity of Jesus and the relevance of the faith that he had grown up with.

Now I don't know if this has ever happened to you but it's amazing how physical sickness or illness can often lead to a great spiritual awakening in our lives; how a lack of health can be God's way to bring about greater clarity of what truly matters in life. God uses these times of acute weakness to bless the lives of others. Sometimes God has to let the circumstances of our lives shout at us to wake up and focus on God. This is exactly what happened with William.

As he was meditating upon who Jesus really is, he wrote a poem. It was largely unknown until an Englishman several years later combined the lyrics of that poem with the melody of Greensleeves. The song took off and became one of the most popular Christmas carols throughout the known world—What Child is This? **IMAGE**

That's the critical question of Christmas, isn't it? What child is this? What child IS this? What child is THIS? What child are we celebrating? What child was born to Mary and Joseph? It is without a doubt, the most important question to consider at Christmas....What Child is This? Tell me your answer to that question and I can tell you your future.

### Are You Ready for Christmas?

Over this past week people have been starting to ask me that very stressful question: You ready for Christmas? Do you have everything ready? Are you ready for the big day? If you're anything like me, the answer is no. You may be here tonight thinking that the most important question facing you tonight is whether or not you have enough AA batteries? or If you have purchased everything and wrapped it.....Those can seem like pressing issues....but let me suggest that those questions are not the reason that each of us is in this room and at this place in this moment.

God has brought each of us here...arranged the circumstances to get us here...to consider a much deeper and more important question...and just to be clear...No, I never feel like I am ready for Christmas....there always seems to be so much to do.

But, I take comfort from the fact that Joseph wasn't ready for Christmas either. I mean think about it, here's Joseph engaged to be married with all his hopes, dreams, and plans for their future, and all of a sudden, all those plans are interrupted and totally changed when he learns that his fiancée Mary is pregnant and he knows for certain that the baby isn't his. Joseph knew he had nothing to do with it.

So, let's be honest. Joseph's first question wasn't, "What child is this?" His first question was probably, "Whose child is this?" Because, one thing that he knew for sure, this child..... certainly wasn't his. Think about what he had to consider....who was Mary

really in love with? Who was the Father of the baby that she is now carrying? The screaming question for Joseph was Whose Child is this?

This is why the angel appears to him. If Joseph is going to publicly accept Mary and this Baby and endure all the ridicule and social shaming that was going to come along with that, then he needed to know the great identity of this Child. The only thing that mattered to Joseph...the only thing that would be pressing on his mind that first Christmas...was the true identity of the Father of this child. So, to get Joseph ready for Christmas, God sends his messenger to teach Joseph who this Child is.

Matthew 1:18–25 (ESV) 18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

We read this today and we go..."OK Joseph...there is your answer...the Father of Mary's baby is God Himself....problem solved"

Joseph did not have the blessing of hindsight...He could not embrace this child or celebrate the birth of this child....or plan his life around this child....until her personally accepted that God himself impregnated Mary...this child was the long awaited Messiah...the God man.

If Joseph could embrace that truth, he could handle anything to come...He would not have an easy life because of this child....but it was worth it...

It's the same with us isn't it? We really can't celebrate Christmas until we embrace the identity of this child. Joseph didn't believe until an angel lit up his world....We don't believe until the Holy Spirit lights up the truth for us. The birth of this child was a supernatural one time event...a miracle of God. We would never accept this based on our own reasoning...our natural understanding...that is why it is Supernatural and a Miracle.

The question of What Child is this? Is always linked to Whose Child is this? You can't answer one with out the other.

None of us are quite ready to celebrate Christmas until we really know who this Child is. So for the next few moments, I want to share God's answer to that most important Christmas question.

This Child Is God for Us

Matthew 1:18–25 (ESV) 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Verse 21, “And you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” You see, the Hebrew name translated from the Greek that the angel gives to Joseph is Yeshua, and Yeshua means “Savior” or more literally “God saves.” So just with this name, Joseph was being told what Child this is. This Child is going to save us. This child did not come to destroy us...He is not against us...**He is God for us!** This Child is God taking on human flesh to save us.

Think of it like this, how do you know for certain if someone is really for you? Think about your relationships. How do you know if someone has really got your back? If someone has your best interests in mind? What you look for is their eagerness to make incredible sacrifices to meet your deepest needs, even when you don't deserve it. These people truly care for you...they often notice when you are in trouble or when things are not right....long before you will admit it to them or to yourself. It is as if they know you sometimes better than you know yourself.

Have you ever known someone like this? Maybe it's a friend, a family member? You experience them reaching out to help you, not because of what you've done but sometimes even despite of what you've done. They see that you are in trouble and they come....even if you don't want them to....That's love. That's someone who you know is for you.

If you've ever experienced that, or you've always longed to experience that, that is a tiny glimpse into the heart of God...God is our biggest fan...he is For Us. If you want to see what true unconditional love looks and feels like...study Jesus...

Here is God himself in all the grandeur and bigness of his divinity and he willingly becomes small for us. While never losing his divinity, we see God becoming a tiny vulnerable infant for us. What is this saying to us? It's that in Jesus, God is 100% for you! He will take on anything....give up anything...and so anything necessary to come to your rescue. He is Yeshua...God saves....He is for you...

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor who was imprisoned for his part in the assassination attempt upon Hitler. Writing from prison he said it was there inside his cell that he had one of the best experiences in his life. “Here I am trapped inside a cell, and my only hope is for someone to come from the outside in to rescue me. There's nothing I can do to get myself out, I need a rescuer.” This is exactly what God in Jesus has come to do for us. He's come to rescue us from the enslaving, imprisoning, separating problem of sin.

This is what we see. It says he will save his people from what? Their sins. Jesus came to deliver us from the very thing that causes us to doubt the goodness of God and turn away from him. He came to deliver us from the sin that causes us to say, “God, I don't need you.”

I realize that sin is not a popular word today but it'll always be a relevant word. Because although sin isn't what people want to hear, it's what we all need to hear because sin is the underlying problem that ails us all. The message of Christmas is that we were born with a genetic illness...a terminal illness that ends in death...we don't have and can't make a cure for our condition... If we are going to be saved from our sin...we need a supernatural miracle to happen. This baby....is that miracle. God sent our cure....He sent Himself. If we're not going to understand the message and meaning of Christmas, then we need to understand the mission of Christ. He came to save us from our sins. Jesus is God's rescue for sinners! Jesus is God for us!

I've heard it said that in every popular Christmas story something happens that turns things around—a foggy storm turns Rudolf's liability into an asset, the unexpected visit of people from his past turns Scrooge into a generous man, and the unexpected joyful hearts of Whoville changes the heart of the Grinch to finally love Christmas.

In all of these stories we love, there's typically something that happens that turns people's lives around. There is often an unexpected moment of clarity that changes everything. Maybe that moment for you is right now. Maybe you have spent your life being against God....you blame Him for everything...your life is miserable and headed nowhere....perhaps your problem is that you haven't embrace the identity of this baby. He may be a Savior but you haven't given Him the chance to be YOUR Savior. You have never considered that He is for you. He came here for you in love...even if you hate Him.

This is the truth that's meant to bring incredible courage into our lives. When Joseph had his moment of clarity after he considered what the angel said....it changed everything about his life. It was knowing that this Child is God for us that gave Joseph the courage to make the hard decision and agree with God about the identity of Jesus. This is the truth that calls us to endure the hard times of life that we don't understand, because as they are we can truly embrace the truth of Christmas the God is For Us....then we can handle anything in life.

The Apostle Paul said, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" All hell could be breaking loose in our lives, but because we know that God is for us, we know that somehow, he is going to work all things together for our good. Deep down He gives us peace. Deep down we know that what is happening is somehow necessary and it is ok....God knows...and He is for us.

I don't know what your concept of God is, but one thing that I have discovered is that many people who are rejecting God are rejecting an unbiblical version of God. The God of the Bible is the God of joy and gladness. The God of the Bible is the Giver and the Source of everything good.

Jesus said in John 10, that "I've come that you might have life and have it abundantly." Let me be clear: The abundant life that Jesus was talking about is not found in the abundance of possessions, it's found in the abundance of joy of knowing that the God of heaven is for you!

If you're here and you're exploring the claims of Christianity, you need to know that this is one of the things that distinguishes Christianity from every other religious system in the world. Every other religious system or spiritual philosophy says that somehow, you've got to pay the price to get to God. But only in Christianity do we hear that God did everything that

was needed to pay the price to get to you. Every other religious system says essentially—you've got to die for God, but Christianity says, God has come in Jesus to die for you.

What Child is this? He is God for us. Part of being God for us meant that he needed to become God with us.

#### Jesus Is God with Us

Matthew 1:18–25 (ESV) 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

In verse 22 Matthew tells us that the birth of Jesus is actually the fulfillment of the ancient prophesy from Isaiah 7, which he quotes in verse 23. That the virgin shall conceive and shall bear a Son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means “God with us.”

Christmas is not the beginning of the story, the story of sin started in Genesis. Initially in the garden God was for us...God was with us...and God was over us...But then we rejected Him...We told Him we could get along on our own...and so He left. But before He left us to our own ways, God promised a Savior...someone to cure our sin problem.... Christmas is really the middle of the story. It's the moment where all of God's promises to once and for all reunite with his people finally begin to find their fulfillment. Christmas is not JUST about a rescue, it's about a reunion. The reunion of God with man.

Several years ago, when so many of our military men and women were serving overseas and were finally returning home, a number of these reunion videos started going viral on social media. Have you seen some of these? PHOTO 1 I can never watch these without crying.

There was this one where during the half time of a high school football game, one of the military families was chosen to go down in the middle of the field and listen to this message that was being broadcasted on the jumbotron by the father and husband who was serving in Afghanistan. In this message he went on to explain to the crowd all the sacrifice that a military family goes through by being apart from their father for so long, and the crowd was cheering for this family.

The father went on to tell his family how much he loved them and how much he did everything that he could to be with them. With tears in his eyes, he told his children “Daddy loves you, and cannot wait to be with you.” Then he said, “And today my prayer is coming true.” Then out of the tunnel this father came walking towards his family. You see his kids instinctively and immediately sprinting toward their dad. There in that moment was this incredible reunion and you could see the joy in his children's faces that finally their father was with them.

We watch these videos, and we may not be able to put it into words, but we know there is something very sacred happening in those moments. I believe it's because it's

touching the very heart of God. It's capturing God's desire to be reunited with his lost children.

We see this all the way back in Genesis. When Adam and Eve had sinned and were hiding from God, there was God seeking them out to be with them and to show them that he was for them. The whole purpose of the Tabernacle and the Temple in the Old Testament was to communicate that the "Above us God" is the "With us God."

All of God's heart and desire to be reunited with his people finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus. Jesus Christ came into this world to be God with us. It was Dale Bruner who pointed out that here in the beginning of Matthew's Gospel Jesus is given the "God with us title" and then at the end of his Gospel, Jesus gives us the "God with us promise" — "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

If you've been hanging around in Christian circles for some time you've probably heard this before—that God is with you. It's a true statement, but it's sort of one of those Christianese things to say that can sort of lose its practical meaning in our lives. A lot of times we can forget some of the practical implications of what God with us really means.

One of the sweetest things about this doctrine is that it teaches us that God is incredibly understanding. If God truly became a man, then, as C.S. Lewis put it, "This earth truly is the visited planet." What this means is that God is not a distant God. This God not only is deeply concerned about our world and our lives, but he knows what it's like to suffer.

This doctrine shows us that the true God is incredibly sympathetic and understanding. Have you shed tears? Jesus wept. Have you been betrayed by a close friend? Jesus was sold for 30 pieces of silver. Have you ever felt alone and forsaken? He was despised and rejected by men. Have you faced temptations? So has he. Have you faced poverty? So has he. Have you faced challenges and trials of various kinds? So has he. In Christianity you discover a God who truly understands you because he is not just God for you, he has come to be God with you.

However, one of the hardest things about this doctrine is that it makes Jesus incredibly necessary. If Jesus is God, then you can't go around Jesus to get to God. I recall a conversation I once had with a gentleman in our neighborhood and throughout the conversation when I had asked him what he thought of Jesus he told me, "Oh, Jesus, yea, I'm ok with Jesus, I believe that he was a very good man."

Now of course I agreed with him, but don't you see, Matthew wants us to know that Jesus wasn't just a good man, Jesus was the God-man. What that means is that if you reject Jesus, then you're rejecting God. This is Logic 101—if Jesus is God, you can't avoid Jesus and get to God. What child is this? This child is God for us, this child is God with us, and then ...

## This Child Is God Over Us

Matthew 1:18–25 (ESV) 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded Him....note that....the angel commanded Him and He obeyed. Joseph knew that **God is Over Us**...He is King.

Joseph didn't just consider what the angel said.... Joseph didn't just say "Ah what a crazy dream...Joseph didn't say....nice suggestion God but I have my own ideas about how to handle this situation... No, he treated the Lord as his King even at the cost of his reputation. He publicly identified with Jesus even when he knew that it was going to cost him socially.

We speak often of Mary's faith and commitment to God...but in every circumstance, Joseph was just as obedient....He was going to quietly divorce Mary....He obeyed the angel...he obeyed and took His family to Egypt...Joseph knew that God is For Us....God is with us...but most importantly...God is above us. He is the one on the throne...not us.

This is why in the carol, "What Child is This?" we sing the lyrics "the King of kings, salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him." But how do we enthrone him?

How do we enthrone him? In other words, how do we treat him as a King? We do what he says. We take him at his word even when it's going to cost us. We walk by faith in God...not by sight as we perceive it.

The real struggle with taking Jesus at his word and obeying him is when we know that that obedience is going to cost us in some way. But this is what we see with Joseph. He recognizes and demonstrates that this child is none other than God over him.

You see, Jesus didn't grow up and earn the right to become King, Jesus was born King. In the carol, "What Child is This," we sing "This, this is Christ the king." Are you treating Jesus as your King? Are you taking him at his word? What Child is This? He is none other than God for us, God with us, and God over us and He would eventually show the world on more thing.

## God is In Us

We have spoken about how you can't leave Jesus in the manger. His life was a mission...a mission focused on a cross...taking the wrath of God for us so that we could live with Him forever.

But there can be a long time between accepting Christ and death for us. We have to live in a fallen world that rejects our God....rejects Jesus....and thus rejects us....So God wanted us to know one more thing about this Child.

If we would allow it...if we would trust Jesus as our Savior, then He would become **God in us**. We become reborn in the Spirit. We have a new birth experience...a Spiritual Birth...with God as our Father too. We become immersed in God and live forever with God in Us.

So the question that must be answered by each of us...this Christmas is the one that faced Joseph....Who's child is this?

#### Conclusion

There are only two kinds of people in this huge world....Those who trust that the Father of this baby is God...and those who don't. I have lived large parts of my life in both camps.

In my life, I have met God in terminal circumstances. I have experienced that health issue that brings everything into focus. I have wrestled with God over the identity of this child.....and like millions of others...have come to understand God's unconditional love.

I know that God is For us...I know that God is With us....I know that God is over us...and I know that because of my faith in Jesus...God is in me.

Around two years after the incredible night of Jesus' birth, the Wise Men show up bearing gifts. They give Jesus the three famous gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What do they symbolize?

Gold was the present for a king, indicating that Jesus is God over us. Frankincense was the incense offered in prayer to God indicating that Jesus is God with us. Myrrh was the spice that was used for people's burials, indicating that Jesus was born to die, that he is God for us and want to live in us.

The Wise Men were ready for Christmas. Joseph was made ready for Christmas. Are you ready? If you can answer that critical question: What child is this? Then no matter how much buying and wrapping you still need to do, I'd say you're more than ready. Join us as Natalie leads us...in...What Child is this? Let's pray.