

## What Child Is This?

### John 1:1-18 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. <sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. <sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup> Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

My wife makes a point of putting up in our kitchen / dining room area every Christmas card we get. It brings a warm fuzzy when you receive these cards because people are thinking about you. It's also nice to hear what's new with them. I especially like the ones where they have an updated family photo. Everyone changes year to year. Now it's getting to the point where some of these people I have trouble recognizing.

Of course, there seems to be plenty of that going on right now. With everyone wearing face masks as they are out and about, I have even more trouble recognizing people. Just a few weeks ago I thought I recognized one of our members at Fresh Market. Had the same size, build, hair color and length. Looked the right age. I said "hi" using the name of the person I thought it was, and they looked confused back at me and said, "Who?" To which I immediately and sheepishly apologized and tried to get out without any further contact because I had failed to recognize this person as different from one of our members.

Thinking of recognizing people, do you recognize what Child this is, the Child we are here to celebrate his birth? Of course you do, right? How could you not? We know that this Child, Jesus, is the Word made flesh, God from true God and Light from Light eternal, born of a virgin, to earth he comes. This baby Jesus is God, the Messiah, the one chosen to take away the sin of the world. We all know this. This is why we chose today of all days, Christmas Day, to not just stay at home in our pajamas, but to put on our church clothes and come to worship. (Or maybe you are right now in your Christmas pajamas worshiping at home...) Regardless, we came here specifically because we know what child this is.

But there are many people who do not recognize who this is. The Apostle John tells us, "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." (verses 9-11) For a moment, we might want to pat ourselves on the back for being the ones who recognize what child this is. But am I starting to fail to recognize exactly who this Child is and what he means for me?

How do I treat this news that God has come to our world, taking on flesh and blood just like one of us? Is it the same old story just a different year? Is it like getting the exact same gifts of wool socks and a homemade sweater that you get every year? I mean, we know that these things have a utility to them, value, but am I excited to receive them? Do I just say, "That's nice," toss them in a pile of other opened presents, and ask what's next to open? Is this how I treat the celebration of the Word becoming flesh? Has "What Child Is This?" become just another Christmas carol or do I sit back and am amazed and marvel at the event we call Christmas? Do I peer into the manger and think that the gift of the Christ Child is a good gift that everyone else should have this year but it doesn't really matter all that much to me because I already have him? Is this Child really what I wanted for Christmas or was it just expected and so I stopped being in awe and wondering about him? Is it like Jesus is wearing a mask and I don't recognize him like I used to?

With Christmas coming towards the end of the year, we have a chance to take stock. Some maybe do so more than others as the question comes up of whether or not you would have made Santa's naughty or nice list. Have you tipped the scales to the good side of things or have your bad deeds outweighed the good? Is that how life works?

If we are being honest with ourselves, we know that there has been a lot of imperfection, of sin. We've messed up many times. During this pandemic, we have been highly stressed out and in that stress we have lashed out at others. In that stress, we weren't always kind. We didn't want to make any other concessions because we had made so many already. I may think of myself as a good person, especially as I don't like to count the little mishaps or mistakes that really don't affect anyone except myself, things that are just in my mind. If I didn't commit some gross crime that I could be arrested for, if I didn't hurt anyone by what I did, then I trick myself into thinking that it didn't count, that it wasn't really a sin, that it wasn't all that bad. I would make the nice list.

However, God tells us that just one sin earns us eternal separation from him. Just one. And that makes me rethink just how good I really have been this year. So many missed opportunities. So many personal sins that I've committed. So many selfish and loveless moments. The more I think about it, the more I am really honest with myself and take stock of this year in review, I have a whole heap of sins that I need saving from.

So, let's take a second look here on Christmas Day and ask ourselves, "What Child is this?" John readily gives us the answer at the start of his Gospel account. This Child is the one who gives us "grace in place of grace already given." (verse 16) Yes, I had grace last year. I had God's undeserved love gifted to me. I had a Savior last Christmas...and the one before that...and the one before that. But I have sinned that much more since last Christmas. I have another year of sin that needs accounting. The Devil stands and accuses me of every single one, any imperfection, any evidence that I am not the perfect being that God demands that I be. He vehemently accuses me, screams that my ledger against God is dripping in red from all the sins I have committed, that I am worthy only of eternal separation from God.

But that's why God gave us the gift of this Child. He is grace upon grace already received. This Christmas, you and I receive all over again the forgiveness that we so desperately need to stand worthy before God. He wipes out all our debts that we have racked up in 2020. You and I are made clean of all our sins. Though they were as scarlet, we were covered in red, now we are as white as snow, forgiven, purified, made clean, the ledger cleared. The Devil's accusations mean nothing now because we have this Child, the one who is grace upon grace already given. For every little thing that we failed to do this year, this Christmas, our whole lives, for every time that we messed up even just a little bit or a whole heap, we have this Child - a Savior who has cleared us of all charges and made restitution for us with his life and his own blood.

This is the gift that we truly need this year, the greatest gift that we get new again every year, the most valuable gift we will ever have. This is the gift of the Christ child. This is grace and truth through Jesus Christ. God has given us the gift of himself. He has made us his family through this Child. "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (verses 12-13) It's not just Jesus' birth we celebrate on Christmas. We are born again – not by our efforts, not by our repentance. We are born of God and his gift to us. We are God's children because we are forgiven with grace upon grace already given by the gift of this Child.

What Child is this? We know who it is. He is "The Word [who] became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (verse 14) This Child is grace upon grace already given, grace new for you and me that we need more than anything else this Christmas. And so we will sing, "Joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the Son of Mary." Amen.