

### What Child IS This?

***On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.***

I have my trusty old drill. I have had it for many years. It is old. It is a corded drill which means I need extension cords for it if I am working around the house. But it is well built and solid. I love this drill. For Christmas I got a new battery operated cordless drill. I've been giving hints the last couple years that I wanted one. With no cord, it is very convenient. I will use it often, but I will not throw away my old drill.

Now I am about to say something that will make me sound a bit dumb. I will admit it. My knowledge of tools and working with tools is in the lower end. My old drill has two settings, forwards and backwards. My new drill has forwards and backwards, but it also has this dial with 22 settings. I've heard about this dial. I know it has something to do with torque and what kind of material you will be drilling through. But that is all I know. If I don't learn more about that dial, I will miss out on this feature. So I opened up the owners manual and learned about the torque settings. Settings 1-3 are for small screws, 4-6 for soft wood, and you work your way up to the highest setting, which is for very hard surfaces like metal or masonry. Now I can take advantage of my new drill.

We just celebrated the birth of Christ. What does that mean? There are a lot of guesses and statements about Jesus is out there. People heard of him. They have ideas about him. But how will they truly know about Jesus and take full advantage of him? Well, there is an owners manual telling us all about Jesus. It is known as the Bible. It tells us exactly who Jesus is.

So let's deal with this question, and ask what our sermon hymn just asked: What Child Is This? This is the most important question in anyone's life, and the answer is given in God's Word.

#### *I. Why is this an important question?*

In our gospel reading we are leaping some thirty years since the birth of Jesus to within six months of his crucifixion. Jesus is in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of the Tabernacles. While there he took the opportunity to preach and teach the thousands of people who also came to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast. What is interesting is the crowd's reaction to Jesus. ***"On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.***

Obviously Jesus made an impression on the people, only they were divided over whom Jesus is. Obviously they have had some Bible knowledge because their opinions were based on things from the Old Testament. Some thought Jesus was "the prophet," not one of many prophets but the one and only prophet. Moses spoke of one prophet who would follow him. Other parts of the Old Testament also spoke of this one prophet. In Malachi he is given the nickname of Elijah. He is the one who would prepare the way for the chosen one, the Messiah. So they thought Jesus was the prophet who would prepare the way for the Christ. Nice guess, but wrong.

Others thought that Jesus was the Christ. This, too, is a very good guess. In fact, they guessed right, but listen to their guess. I get the impression here that maybe some were not 100% sure.

But some in the crowd denied that Jesus could be the Christ. They, too, had some knowledge of the Old Testament, like our Old Testament reading today. They knew the Christ must come from Bethlehem, the birth place of King David. When the wise men visited Jerusalem, remember how Herod's Bible scholars could figure out the birthplace of Jesus by reading it in the Old Testament? You have to know your Bible to see this. But they based their guess on insufficient information. The Jesus before them came from Nazareth so he couldn't be the Christ, they thought, so they rejected him as the Christ. If only they had asked him, he would have told them that he moved to Nazareth. He was born where? In Bethlehem.

These were not the only opinions that day. Read all of John 7. Jesus' own brothers didn't really know who he was. They encouraged him to go to Jerusalem and perform his miracles there so he could get more attention. They thought he was sort of an entertainer, not the Christ. Soldiers were sent to arrest Jesus, but they didn't. They were so overwhelmed by his preaching they knew he was some special, but that's it.

And this makes me think of another time Jesus asked in Matthew 16, ***"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, '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.'"*** Still more opinions over Jesus.

Am I being a bit harsh on these people? No. At the very end of this chapter, we are told, ***"Then each went to his own home."*** Though curious about Jesus, it didn't matter to them who he was. It didn't matter if he was a prophet or the Christ or anyone we should pay attention to. They went on with their lives.

You would think that after 2,000 years of Christmas celebrations and readings of Luke 2, the world would know better, but they do not. Jews and Muslims call him a prophet. Jehovah's witnesses call him an exalted angel. Mormons call him a good Mormon who was reincarnated and is populating some planet out there. Liberal scholars and theologians basically say Jesus is

whoever you want him to be as long you do not consider him God and deny his miracles. Atheists consider him a crutch for the weak.

Does it matter what people think of Jesus? This is more than a mere trivia question. Its answer determines where you spend eternal life. It is a matter of eternal and spiritual life or death, and sadly, if you don't get the answer right, you lose.

What opinion do you have of Jesus? We know the answer. We can recite the words of the Apostles' Creed from heart. But could it be that we don't take full advantage of him? Do we regard Jesus as something like a team mascot? He is fun to watch, but like the mascot, he is on the sidelines. He really doesn't determine who wins the game. He doesn't determine what goes on in our lives. That is up to us alone. Do we regard him like aspirin? Good to have, but we reach for him only when we need him. Or is he like my new drill? We don't take advantage of all he does for us, so we don't pray often, and our prayers tend to focus on earthly things and not about our spiritual selves. We live with guilt instead of laying it at the foot of the cross. We go around as if this world is all we have as if he is not in heaven preparing a room for us.

## *II. The answer is in God's Word.*

What child is this? We can know for certain who he is. I learned about my new drill from the manual. There is a manual that explains Jesus to us. It is God's Word. Remember when Jesus asked his disciples what people thought of him? Some thought he was a prophet like Jeremiah or the Baptist? All guesses, and bad guesses. Then he asked them. ***"But what about you? Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."*** Peter and the other disciples knew Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God. They knew, not because it made sense. They knew because it was revealed to them.

God's Word tells us about Jesus. Of course, that crowd that was divided over Jesus had some knowledge of their Bibles. All of their guesses were based on a passage or two. Their problem was they didn't let the rest of the Bible explain Jesus to them. Instead, they relied more on their thinking abilities or what they have seen, not heard. Let all the passages of the Bible tell you about God. Take the phrase, "God so loved the world." That is in the Bible. But what does that mean? If we don't read on, we can only guess. But if we read on, what do we discover? "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life." The Bible tells us, "The wages of sin is death." But read on, "...but the gift of God is eternal life." The Bible reminds us of the predicament we are in when it says, "As for you, you were dead in your sins and transgressions." But read it and hear what it says, "But God made you alive in Christ" and how forgiveness and salvation is ours through faith which too is a gift from God.

So the Bible answers for us the question, "What child is this?" It also tells us what Jesus means to us. And it also gives us the conviction like Peter to say, "You are the Christ, the Son of God." We don't answer the question of who he is. We believe in him and we trust him and we know we have eternal life.

I have a file for all the instruction manuals I have whether for the TV or the toaster or for my new drill. I keep them so I can go back and re-learn how to use that appliance. So, for my new drill, what setting is best for driving a screw into hard wood again? If I am not sure, I can go back and look. We know this child is Jesus, but what does that mean to us? Don't guess. Go back to his Word and see all that Jesus does and will do for you now and for eternity. Then we don't just go back home and move on with our lives. We live a new life in him. And we have nothing to fear for he says, "I am with you always to the very end of the age." Amen.