

CHRISTMAS 2006
“WHAT CHILD IS THIS?”
PART I
John 1:1-18
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^{ESV} **John 1:1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Introduction

When I was a youngster, I would always anticipate greatly the Christmas season when our neighbor would light up his entire yard with Christmas lights and plastic figurines to cheer up the weary world at the most anticipated time of year.

It was a particularly American Christmas displayed. He had plastic light-up Frosty the Snowman, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, and Santa was also lit, and it made all the children happy (and perhaps a few adults!).

But, right smack dab in the middle of this **“Who’s who of Christmas”** was also a lit up plastic manger scene as well. Baby Jesus in the manger with a lit up Mary and Joseph on each side were also there to make the season bright.

Now, I won’t get into how this might trivialize God’s incarnation. But Frosty, Rudolph, Santa and Jesus seem strange “yard fellows”. Think about it: how has it come to be for many Americans that Jesus and the manger scene “fits” with Frosty, Rudolph, Santa and the rest?

In contrast, what do the gospel writers (that “hall of verbal portraits of Jesus”) want to teach us concerning the manger scene and its meaning? Surely it is NOT that the revelation of God’s Christ in a manger-cave was meant to also be seen with Frosty, Rudolph, and Santa! But what do the gospels insist upon us asking ourselves and others?!

What Child is This?

When we look into the manger what do we see? Who do we see? Why is that baby so important? ***What Child is this??*** That’s what the gospel writers want us to ask- -and to believe what they show us verbally through their words.

The gospel writers will not have Jesus surrounded by American Christmas icons such as Frosty, Rudolph and Santa, but want us to see the humbling of God himself the Second Person of the Trinity as a human baby surrounded by needy, poor sinners such as shepherds, Magi, Mary and Joseph, and the cattle who were created through him by God our Creator.

In our own lives we may experience through our own experience or vicariously through others the precious and what we call the “miraculous” (really an act of providence, not by definition a miracle but we know what most mean!) **birth of a baby**.

Yet the baby in Bethelhem’s manger-cave is a baby that we truly ask: ***“What child is this?” Or better: “What child IS this?” What does it matter to me and my family? What does it matter in the big scheme of things for the world?***

The nativity and birth of Jesus is more than a sweet story to tell children about “baby Christmas Jesus”. It is the story of God’s redemptive-history reaching its fulfillment (Gal. 4:4), and God’s own Son taking human flesh in order to be “God with us” and to save his people from their sins!

What did the Magi see? What did the shepherds see? What did Mary and Joseph see? What do we see when we look with eyes of faith into the manger?

You may remember the reason for which John writes his gospel:

^{ESV} John 20:31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The manger scene in the gospels is with the purpose of causing us to cry out with Thomas: “My LORD, and my God!” (John 20:28).

*All creation reveals God above us;
The Law reveals God against us;
The manger reveals God with us...
...and if God is with us, he is for us!*

I. WHAT CHILD IS THIS? “WHO IS HE?”

a. Deity of Jesus Christ

i. “Before the manger...”

^{ESV} **John 1:1-3:** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

John 1:1-3 (Greek) VEn avrch/| h=n o` lo,goj(kai. o` lo,goj h=n pro.j to.n qeo,n(kai. qeo.j h=n o` lo,gojÅ ² ou-toj h=n evn avrch/| pro.j to.n qeo,nÅ ³ pa,nta diV auktou/ evge,neto(kai. cwri.j auktou/ evge,neto ouvde. e[nÅ o] ge,gonen

Nicene Creed

“And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,
***Begotten of his Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
Very God of very God,
Begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,
By whom all things were made...***”

ii. Jesus Christ was “In the beginning” (en arche)

- Before the creation “in the beginning”
 - a. Jesus lived eternally before he had his first birthday! “Before Abraham was, I AM” –John 8:58.
 - b. John the Baptist witnesses in John 1:15: The Bible says: John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”

- c. Can you imagine rushing to the bedside of a woman who has just formally greeted her infant after his birth and asking if he had lived before the birth?
 - d. This would have been the kind of question Mary would have pondered throughout her own life.
- The first sentence of the Bible “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
 - “In the beginning **was the WORD**. *The Word existed before creation, before all things were made through him.*
 - All things were created through him (v. 3). Christ is **God’s Agent of creation**. John says: “Nothing was made or created that has been made or created without him.”

^{ESV} ***John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.***

- iii. **What is ‘the WORD’?** The Wisdom/Word to Hebrews/ the Logos/Word to Greeks
- iv. “The Word was With God and was God...” -***Distinct from, yet equal with God.***
 - kai. o` lo,goj h=n pro.j to.n qeo,n(kai. qeo.j h=n o` lo,goj
 - The Word was “with” or “toward” God (intimate relationship) and literally “God was the Word” to emphasize his deity- -his Godness.

Christ’s Supreme Deity

1. John’s main intent is to stress the deity, or “God-ness” of Jesus Christ in his prologue as well as throughout his gospel (Compare 1:1, 18; 20:28-31; “I AM statements of Jesus).
2. This is the ultimate question for ourselves, our friends, family and neighbors: **“Who Do You Say Jesus Is?”** How you answer this reveals whether you have a Savior who

can truly save: One like you, not like you; One who was with God, and was God!

3. **Men today deny his divinity and accept him as just a “good teacher” or nice religious person.** He is called by some to be the first social activist, feminist, pluralist, and everything else under the sun other than “very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one essence with the Father.”

1. Denying Christ’s divinity is man’s last ditch effort to diminish or rewrite the revelation of God’s hope extended to man through the babe in the manger, in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.
 - Strip Jesus of His Authority- No Obedience
 - Strip Jesus of His Majesty- No Worship
2. Perhaps this denial of his deity, and therefore of Jesus’ authority and majesty is why we might find a manger scene alongside the likes of Frosty, Rudolph, and Santa Claus proudly displayed in many American front yards!
3. Perhaps men inherently know he is their only hope but do not want to submit to his will because of their **sinful selfishness and self-centeredness.**
 - a. What Philip Rieff the sociologist called ***‘The Therapeutic Self’***.
 - b. ‘The Therapeutic Self can take bits and pieces from each religion if it suits their vague self-centered spirituality (AKA “cafeteria religion” or “buffet spirituality”).
 - c. So, Baby Christmas Jesus could be a nice addition as long as you don’t command them to worship him as God incarnate—and worship no other but him! (perhaps you might break their spirit and damage the self-esteem of the ‘Therapeutic Self’?)
4. Perhaps men want Jesus on their own terms. Give me the baby Christmas Jesus, but don’t threaten me with the one who said “I AM that I AM” or that **“I am**

the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me!"

4. If he is just a good teacher, he is not even that. C. S. Lewis said one time, we can call Jesus a liar, a lunatic, or Lord, but we cannot merely call him a good teacher if indeed he was not God.

***ESV* Colossians 2:9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...**

- v. One full of grace and truth.
- Only God can offer in its fullness grace and truth!
 - We need the grace of God and we need to know the truth of God!

***All creation reveals God above us;
The Law reveals God against us;
The manger reveals God with us...
...and if God is with us, he is for us!***

b. Humanity of Jesus Christ

John 1:14: And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Some Notes of Reminder as we tread in this mysterious, yet glorious territory:

- i. Jesus Christ was not some cosmic "half and half" (a little bit God and a little bit man).
- ii. God the Second Person of the Trinity did not cease being God when he became man.
- iii. Jesus Christ is *theanthropos*: The God Man (One unique Person or individual with two natures).

- iv. Jesus Christ did not take upon human nature just for a little while, but permanently became the God Man (both God and Man) permanently forever- *-The Second Person of the Trinity became something he was not previously in the incarnation without in any way diminishing his deity.*

Christ is two natures united in one person forever. This doctrine is called **the "hypostatic union."** The Westminster Shorter Catechism very concisely and clearly states this essential doctrine:

"The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever."

Nicene Creed

"...Who for us and for our salvation,
Came down from heaven,
And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary,
And was made man..."

- ii. "The Word became flesh..." (v. 14)
- What kind of flesh?
 - a. Not flesh tainted by sin.
 - b. But the "likeness of sinful flesh"- Romans 8:3-4
 - c. Flesh united to deity that was born to bear our burdens, sins, and the curse.
 - d. Flesh united to deity that was without sin, yet able to feel our infirmities, weaknesses, and the struggles and temptations of a world of sin and misery.
 - Read Romans 8:3-4

^{ESV} Romans 8:3-4: For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- Read Hebrews 2:14-18

^{ESV} **Hebrews 2:14-18:** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

- a. Made like the Seed of Abraham “real flesh and blood”
- b. Took upon himself flesh and blood in order to take upon himself the curse of sin and hell for his people.
- c. Took upon flesh in order to destroy death, hell, and the devil.
- d. Now he is able to help in time of temptation and struggle.

iii. “...And dwelt-tabernacled among us.”

- A phrase loaded with theological significance (Remember the eschatological goal of God dwelling with man).
- God became one of us and dwelt or tabernacled among us.
- God’s glory was seen paradoxically in the face of a crying baby.

iv. Getting at understanding Jesus Christ’s true humanity through understanding Mary’s conception, her pregnancy, her delivery of her son.

- Mary’s amazement at the words of the angel.
- Mary’s conception by the Holy Spirit.

- Mary's pregnancy and pain during the pregnancy (including Jesus kicking within the womb).
- Mary's carrying the WORD for 9 months.
- Mary delivering the WORD in a manger-cave.
- Mary caring for the WORD who became flesh for most of his life.
- Mary's pain and helplessness in his suffering God's wrath on the cross.
- Mary's salvation found in her Son alone!

***Jesus Christ was Son of God and son of Mary!
Deity and humanity in hypostatic union!***

The Creed of Chalcedon

October 22, 451

"We then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial (homoousion) with the Father according to the Godhead, and **consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God (theotokos), according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature preserved, and concurring in one person (prosopon) and one subsistence (hypostasis), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only -begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ;** as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us."

The Creed of Athanasius

"...It is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ . For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, **that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man. God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance of His Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul in human flesh subsisting; Equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching His Manhood. Who, although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but one Christ;**

**One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh,
but by taking of the Manhood into God;
One altogether; not by confusion of Substance,
but by unity of Person.**

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man,
so God and Man is one Christ.

Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell,
rose again the third day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God
Almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead..."

Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 8.2

WCF 8.2 The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature,(1) **with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin**;(2) being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance.(3) So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion.(4) Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.(5) (1)John 1:1,14; 1 John 5:20; Phil. 2:6; Gal. 4:4. (2)Heb. 2:14,16,17; Heb. 4:15. (3)Luke 1:27,31,35; Gal. 4:4. (4)Luke 1:35; Col. 2:9; Rom. 9:5; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Tim. 3:16. (5)Rom. 1:3,4; 1 Tim. 2:5.

v. Jesus' sympathy with us

- **"No one understands how I feel?!"** How can we ever say this? Christ was born to sympathize with our weaknesses (sufferings, troubles, pains, cares, worries, and anxieties...all that this present evil age with its sin and misery has to offer you).
- **Think of Christ's human emotions as the One who is God and has taken upon himself permanently a human nature:**
 - a. Compassion or pity for the weak, sick, and suffering of this present evil age
 - b. Sympathy
 - c. Understanding
 - d. Anger at the effects of the curse of the fall in the dark world of sin and misery
 - e. Sadness, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief

- f. Love
- g. Patience with sinners
- h. Hebrews 2:17: “Made like his brethren in every way...”

This is the loving reigning One at God’s right hand who ever intercedes for you!

^{ESV} **Hebrews 4:14-16:** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 3:16** Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: ***He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.***

Conclusion: “What Child IS This?”

This child is...

The Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last
 God Almighty
 The Lamb of God, the Lion of Judah
 The Way, the Truth and the Life
 The Long Awaited Messiah
 The Second Adam, who would reverse the curse
 The Lord and Savior of all those who believe

The next time you look into the gospels and you peer by faith with the shepherds, Magi, Mary and Joseph, you can now answer the question ‘What child is this?’ but don’t confuse him with Frosty, Rudolph and Santa as nice as they may be.

The baby in the manger was very God of very God, begotten, not made being of one substance with the Father, who for us, and for our salvation came down from heaven not only to be born, but...

“...and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.” – Nicene Creed

As the famous hymn ‘What Child is this?’ articulates:

**“This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
...Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary.”**

***“Joy to the world! The Lord is come...let heaven and nature
sing”—let all creation praise God’s indescribable gift to us! Let
us rejoice in the work of salvation and redemption secured and
accomplished in human flesh on behalf of those whom you
love.***

***All creation reveals God above us;
The Law reveals God against us;
The manger reveals God with us...
...and if God is with us, he is for us!***