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**"WHAT CHILD IS THIS?"**

**A Christmas Meditation**

**Scripture Reading – Matthew  
1:18-25**

The title of this devotional asks the question "What Child is this?" It is a question posed by William C Dix's in his carol with the same title. He answers his own question in the carol, "This, This is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing."

This King was born in Bethlehem of Judea in a manger. Bethlehem was a simple ordinary town. Nothing really exciting or significant took place at Bethlehem. But it had a place of significance in prophecy. The Prophet Micah said that the Lord would be born in Bethlehem. Do you remember his words "But you Bethlehem Ephrata

though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who would be ruler over Israel..." Note the words "...though are small among the clans of Judah... a ruler will emerge from you." In itself, Bethlehem had nothing of glory. That is until God decided to make His entrance into history at that insignificant place. It was because of this event that God gave the village not only significance, but also its glory. It was transformed from the ordinary to the extra-ordinary.

World history gives little information about that tiny village. It had no castles and no princes, no temple and no priests. And yet there was much in Bethlehem that brought to mind the glory of God. The very name of Bethlehem meant "the house of bread." Surely this reminds is of the Savior, who said of Himself, "I am the bread of life." The older name of the village, Ephrata, meant "fruitful." In world history what little town has been so "fruitful" as the birthplace of our Savior? At the gate of the town was David's well, and

not far from its limits were the pools of Siloam. They were symbols of living water; streams about which the scriptures say "make glad the city of God." From the standpoint of the world, there was nothing exciting or sensational about the place. However, God chose this little town to be the birthplace of His Son. Now if there is anything to celebrate, this is. God was at work in that little town at that moment in time. The scriptures make clear that when the hour was fully come God sent forth His one and only Son. There are some truths from this passage of scripture that bring the meaning of Christmas into focus. I suggest that this moment in history was,

***A MOMENT OF RECOGNITION.***  
**Matthew 1:18-24.**

It is the recognition that God had come to this world in the person of His one and only Son, to provide salvation for all mankind. It is amazing how He acts, and who He selects to accomplish His purposes in our world. His choices are revealing and sometimes mysterious.

This chapter touches on the birth of His one and only Son, and the events surrounding His arrival on earth. Who does God

use to bring about this miracle, and how does He work in the accomplishment of His purpose? All that transpired at that moment in history, revealed the wisdom and power of God. It is clear that the way God brought about this event was not the way man would do it in his limited wisdom. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:19, wrote, "For the wisdom of the world is foolishness in God's sight." One translation has it "What the world calls smart, God calls stupid." The world would go for the sensational. It would plan for fanfare, parades and publicity. After all this was the Son of God here in Bethlehem. God, however, is not interested in the sensational, but He is supremely interested in salvation. He does not have to have neon lights and great events to make His point. He has nothing to prove. He can do all things whether man believes it or not. God was intent on fulfilling His purposes. The scriptures make quite clear that the time was ripe for the coming of His Son. He came in the form of a baby, through a simple Virgin Mary, and chose unknown righteous man Joseph to be the earthly father of the new born King. It was angels who conveyed the good news to humble shepherds. This would not be our way, BUT it was God's way. And all His purposes would be fulfilled in His time, His will and His way. Advent

season is a good time to reflect on the qualities in the people that God selects to bring about the fulfillment of His purposes. Before we get into this discussion it is interesting to observe that His coming was characterized by

### ***Simplicity.* Matthew 1:18-25**

There was no elaborate event planned to announce His coming to the world. He did not arrange for the baby to be born in Herod's court or Caesar's palace. There was no red carpet laid down for His arrival. The whole picture was one of simplicity, the common and the ordinary. A star in the east! A barn! A Manger! Born among animals! Worshipped by the three wise men! Adored by humble shepherds and born into a family chosen from among the ordinary people of the land. None of the rich and famous were selected. Where were the monarchs, the governors, the religious leaders and the scholars? Where were they? They were not in God's plan for this moment in history. Simplicity was the hallmark of the birth of the Son of God.

So what kind of people were the instruments God chose to use in the birth of His Son? What were their character traits? Joseph the earthly father of Jesus is an ordinary person who was of the common run of society. He

probably would not have been noticed as a man with distinctive talents. He was a simple carpenter who was faithful to his tasks. But the scriptures make clear that He was a man of,

### ***Integrity.* Matthew 1:19.**

**The way he handled Mary and the birth of the Christ Child is indicative of this quality. But his integrity was born in the in the fact that he was considered to a righteous man. This quality of righteous character is seen in the man Joseph, and little is said about him, but what we do know about Him is significant. He obeyed the requirements of the law. Luke 2:4. He followed the directions of the angel of the Lord. Matthew 1;24. 2:14; 21;23 He Showed respect and restraint toward Mary, his wife. He honored the religious traditions of his fathers. Luke 2:22; 39;41. But there is a simple and powerful statement in this passage of scripture in verse 19. "Joseph her husband was a righteous man." Integrity is an inseparable component of his righteousness. These qualities were wrapped up together. He was a "righteous man." It was not said with great fanfare. It was said with quiet force**

**and strong conviction. This is what stood out in him, What was important to God, was that he was a man of integrity – a righteous man. It says a whole lot about him. It is clear and important to note that this is God's assessment of him.**

Righteousness of character is always gets the attention of God. He considers it to be an indispensable quality in his servants if they are to be useful and usable. Paul makes clear that if we are to be God's instruments we are to be made righteous. In Romans 6:19. "Just as you offered the parts of your bodies to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, offer the parts of you bodies in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness." **The quality of righteousness is important to God. Again and again in scripture it gets the attention of God.**

**I suggest that this was one reason why Joseph was chosen to be the earthly father of Jesus. The story does not mention that Joseph was a man of great talent or charismatic personality.** It did not say that he was a great organizer or an efficient administrator. You can possess all of these abilities and not be a righteous person. God is more concerned with what we are, than the abilities we

possess. God can only use a righteous man to accomplish His purposes and Joseph was a righteous man. He was man of integrity.

Now what is the chief quality that God observed in Mary? It was a quality that was closely allied to what Joseph possessed. It was the quality of,

***Purity.* Mathew 1:20,23.**

**She was a virgin and the Child that was conceived in her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.** Luke amplifies this truth in the first chapter of His gospel verses 26-28. Again what comes through is that God is concerned with purity of character. The angel said to her "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Luke 1:28. She was to give birth to the Son of God. She was a humble village woman who lived in a small town, a place so insignificant as to lead Nathaniel to say, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" But out of it and from the womb of a simple woman came the Son of God and it did not matter to God that she was an unknown woman who lived in obscurity and would have remained so, if she had not been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. That bothers men but it did not bother God. Social standing and prominent position were not

God's concern. Righteous character and purity of heart and life are those qualities that He considers vital in those He chooses to be His instruments. This hour that heralded the coming of the Messiah was a moment of recognition. It was recognition of the qualities for which God looks in His instruments. Not only was it a moment of recognition it was,

***A MOMENT OF REFLECTION***  
**Matthew 1:23.**

**"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son." We should ponder its implications. We must reflect on this miracle and what it means for mankind. This is no ordinary birth in Bethlehem, and certainly this is no ordinary baby.** This moment in history is not a casual moment. There is something about this baby and his birth that is extraordinary. It is different from all other births. What Child is this that is born in Bethlehem? Why is He so different from other babies? Why is this birth so unique? As we reflect on this, we come to the conclusion that in its

***Method it is Miraculous***  
**Matthew 1:23.**

**Matthew tells us that a "virgin will conceive and will birth to a Son."** This is shock treatment to human thinking.

"It is impossible you might say." How can this take place?" In the Gospel of Luke, Mary herself was mystified by it, for she asks the question, "how will this be since I am a virgin?" It was a reasonable question and a natural response from her. For a virgin to be with child defies all the biological principles of the natural world. How can this be? It is inconceivable and certainly impossible, ***"OR IS IT?"*** Is it not possible that when God steps into the equation things take on a different light? Suddenly the impossible becomes possible because with God all things are possible. This is a miraculous event. It is a supernatural happening. The Angel explained to Mary how it would take place in Luke 1: 35-37. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be will be called the Son of God." This would ensure that the Christ Child was not subject to the transmission of original sin. The seed was holy – the conception without the taint of sin. He would be perfectly holy and sinless and thus qualified to be the perfect sinless sacrifice for the sins of the world. "He would be called the Son of God." Jesus was born of a virgin, for nothing is impossible with God. This birth is unique because in its method it is miraculous. Further reflection leads us to conclude that in its

**Manifestation it is  
Momentous.** Matthew 1:23.

**“They will call His name  
Immanuel which means  
“God with us.” Do you mean  
to say God with us???? That  
weak vulnerable baby in a  
manger is God with us?  
What an incredible**

**manifestation!** An Old pioneer traveled westward across the Great Plains until he came to an abrupt halt at the edge of the Grand Canyon. He gawked at the sight before him before him: a vast chasm one mile down, eighteen miles across, and more than a hundred miles long! He gasped and said, “something must have happened here.” We still celebrate the birthday of Jesus over two thousand years after His birth. Have you often wondered why? I will tell you why, because something cataclysmic happened back there in a manger. The world would never be the same. John said it well, “the Word who was with God and was God became flesh and lived among us.” Charles Wesley wrote,

**“Mild He lays His glory by,  
BORN that men no more may  
die,  
BORN to raise the sons of  
earth,  
Born to give them second  
birth.”**

Dr. Sidlow Baxter put it well, “the great Architect of the Universe walks to me out of His infinity and invisibility in human form. He looked on me through human eyes: beckons to me with human hands: feels for me with human emotions. This baby is God with us.” This is the manifestation of God in the flesh, and it is without doubt a momentous revelation. But this is not all, this birth is

**Modest in its Manner.**  
Matthew 1:23.

**The King was born in of a  
humble virgin. His birth was  
modest in its manner. Paul  
says “He was rich yet for our  
sakes He became poor.”** He by passed the palace of king Herod, ignored the courts of the nobles, and refused to seek the adulation of Caesar and the approval of the Roman senate. He was “rich and for our sakes He became poor.” At His birth there was no room for Him at the inn. Luke 2:7. In life there was no home for him in which to live, or pillow on which to lay His head. Matthew 8:20. An in death there was no grave for Him in which to rest for His was a borrowed grave. Matthew 27:59-60. Paul wrote in the paraphrase of J. B. Phillips, **“For He who had always been God by nature, did not cling to His prerogative as God’s equal, but stripped Himself of all privilege by**

consenting to be a slave by nature, and being born as a mortal man. And having become a man, He humbled Himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying and the death He died was the death of a common criminal." "Christ always identified Himself with the least, the last and the lost." His coming was modest in its manner and this event which took place in a manger 2000 years ago, calls for a moment of reflection. But this miraculous event is also,

***A MOMENT OF REALIZATION***  
**Matthew 1:21-23.**

**Mary will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the Name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins...They will call Him Emmanuel which means God with us." It is important to emphasize two truths which Matthew highlights about this event. They are fundamental to the Christmas message. They focus on the Christ child. The first is that,**

***God is with us.*** Matthew 1:23.

**This is the great truth of the incarnation, or As Charles Wesley would write "Our God contracted to Man, Incomprehensibly made**

**man." They call Him Immanuel which means "God is with us." God Himself came to us.** Larry King created a lucrative career by simply asking questions. This celebrity has been interviewing people for over forty years with his mastery of probing questions. The tables were turned when he was interviewed for the fortieth anniversary of his broadcasting debut. Bryant Gumbel had the honor of asking King some very interesting questions. Possibly the most interesting question came at the conclusion of the show when Gumbel asked King, "What question would ask God if he were a guest on your show?" King ignited with a torrent of questions about God's level of participation in human activity, but the first question out of his mouth was "Do you have a son?" Although King claims to be an agnostic, he understands the importance of asking this question first. Determining Jesus' relationship to God is indispensable for salvation, but we needn't wait for God's reply. He has already answered this at Christmas. God sent His Son born of a woman. He is the Son of God indeed He is God Himself. The message of Christ is that God is with us. But it also that,

***God is for us.*** Matthew 1:23.

**“He was given the name Jesus because He would save His people from their sins.” He is the only Savior from sin because He was crucified and He died for our salvation.** On October 4, 1997, over a million men gathered in Washington D.C., for Promise Keeper’s Stand in the Gap. They day - long event featured many different speakers. One of those worship leaders was Max Lucado. In typical fashion, he urged the crowd to shout the names of their individual denominations. Denominational Names were lost in the verbalization of church affiliations and created nothing more than confused noise. He then called the assembly to shout the name of their Savior. From the pathway of men over one mile in length was shouted the same name and message: It was the name Jesus Christ. While you maybe nervous about the method that was used, we can be confident about the truth that was proclaimed. It was clear, obvious and strong. If we look to salvation in the church of our choice we may find a confusing and contradictory message. For there are those who do preach a confusing message. We need to recognize that the church is not the source of salvation she is conveyer of the message of Salvation. It is when we look to Christ for the security and assurance of our salvation we

will find the truth and the joy of eternal life. They called His name Jesus for He will save us from our sins. This tells us that God is for us. God is with us because He is for us. “They shall call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins.” This is the evidence that the living God is for us and it is revealed in the birth of and His one and only Son to be the only Savior of the world. All other Savior’s are counterfeits. It is in Him and only Him that our hope and assurance of salvation rests. A street preacher in London was preaching to a crowd that had gathered around him. It was at the time of the Shamrock races, and everyone was talking of the event. A ruffian on the edge of the crowd thought he would have a little fun, so he called three times, “Mr. Preacher! What do know about the Shamrock?” Finally the fourth time, not to be silenced, the ruffian called again, Mr. Preacher! I’m asking what do you know about the Shamrock? This time the preacher paused. The crowd became very still. Pointing upward with one hand, he said clearly and distinctly that everyone could hear him, “On Christ, the solid rock I stand; all other rocks are sham rocks.” All other Redeemers are counterfeit. All other Saviors are sham. There is only one Savior and He is Jesus the Son of God.



This child in a manger is proof that God is for us.

The story is told of a woman who was out shopping with her children. After many hours of looking at row after row of toys and everything else imaginable, and after hearing both her children asking for everything they saw on those shelves, she finally made it to the elevator. She was feeling what so many of us feel during the holiday season time of the year.

Overwhelming pressure to go to every party, every house warming, taste all holiday food and treats, getting that perfect gift for every single person on the shopping list, and the pressure of making sure that we respond to everyone who sent us a card. Finally the elevator doors opened and there was already a crowd in the elevator. She pushed her way into the elevator and dragged her two kids with her all her bags of stuff. When the doors closed she couldn't take it anymore and stated, "Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be found, strung up and shot," From the back of the elevator she heard a quiet calm voice respond, "Don't worry, we already crucified Him." For the rest of the trip down in the elevator it was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop. "What Child is this?" Who is this baby who lies so helpless and vulnerable in a manger? He is the one who came to die for our sins. He was the one who was crucified for our transgressions.

**The Child is none other than the Savior of the World.**