

“What Child Is This?”

Isaiah 7:10-14

preached at Power Praise - December 18, 2011

Oklahoma City made startling and shocking news Sunday morning, Dec. 6, 1964. A 31 year old mother gave birth to a child on the sidewalk at the corner of Sheridan and Broadway. A curious crowd “watched without helping.” The woman and her baby lay on the pavement for about 45 minutes in a temperature of about 34 degrees. A visitor from Tulsa summoned a taxi. When the cab arrived, however, the driver refused to take the mother to the hospital. Then the helpful stranger called the police to no avail. During the time the woman lay on the sidewalk, two patrol cars passed the scene but neither stopped. A former state representative chanced that way, stopped and called the fire department for an ambulance. He also sent a man across the street to a hotel to borrow a blanket, but the hotel refused. Meanwhile the rescue squad arrived. While waiting for an ambulance, Captain Bill Latham of the fire department and the former representative Bob Cunningham, decided to take the mother and her child to the hospital in Mr. Cunningham's car. And they did.

It is amazing to me that so many people can see someone in need and they refuse to lend a hand, refuse to do anything about it. Particularly in the Christmas season, during this time of anticipation, waiting for the birth of a child, that they would ignore a mother and child laying on a cold sidewalk. I guess the world has not changed a whole lot over the past 2000 years. Back then there was another woman heavy with child. *“And she gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, for there was no room for them in the inn.”* What child is this, for which we have no room?

In 1952 in a New York public school, students were invited by their teacher to mention things associated with Christmas. The children responded spontaneously, “Santa Claus, Reindeer, Christmas trees, Presents.” Then a little girl said, “The birthday of Jesus.” And the teacher quickly replied, “Oh no, that's not what we mean.” What child is this, that he cannot even be mentioned?

Just a few days before Christmas two ladies stood looking into a department store window at a large display of the manger scene with clay figures of the baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men, and the animals. Disgustedly, one lady said, “Look at that, the church trying to horn in on Christmas.” What child is this that cannot be part of this week's celebration?

A junior high school in Memphis was putting on a Christmas play and this announcement was included in the program. *“All of the cast will be played by members of the eighth grade, except the baby Jesus, who will be played by a concealed 40-watt light bulb.”* What child is this who so many still try to conceal from the rest of the world?

A choir director asked a pastor to pick up the sheet music for “How Great Thou Art?” The pastor went into a music store and asked the clerk, “Do you carry any religious sheet music?” The clerk thought for a moment and then said, “Some of the Christmas music might be religious.” What child is this, whom angels greet with anthems sweet?

George Bernard Shaw wrote, *“I am sorry to have to introduce the subject of Christmas in these articles. It is an indecent subject; a cruel, gluttonous subject; a drunken, disorderly subject; a wasteful*

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disastrous subject; a wicked, cadging, lying, filthy, blasphemous, and demoralizing subject. Christmas is forced on a reluctant and disgusted nation by the shopkeepers and the press; in its own merits it would wither and shrivel in the fiery breath of universal hatred; and anyone who looked back to it would be turned into a pillar of greasy sausages.” What child is this, whose birth is described in such a way as this?

What child is this? Could this possibly be the child who Isaiah said would be a sign of God's ongoing presence in our world? Could this possibly be the child who would shine the divine light of God's love into our dark hearts and souls? Could this child possibly be the mighty ruler, the wonderful counselor that the world had waited centuries to see? Could this be the child about whom angelic choirs burst into song? Could this be the child that shepherds rushed to see, the awe-inspiring Lamb of God? Could this be the child whose star lit up the night sky? Could this be the child whom wise men traveled hundreds of miles to see? Could this be the child who terrified Herod? Could this be the child whose birth was announced by Gabriel, first to Mary and then to Joseph? Could this be the child from whom salvation has come?

The story is told by C.E. Smith of San Jose of a christening that was to be held many years ago by a very wealthy European family. Many guests were invited to the home for the occasion and came in the very latest fashionable garb. Their wraps and coats were carried to a bedroom and laid upon the beds. After the usual lot of conversation and commotion, they were ready for the christening ceremony and someone asked, “Where is the baby?” The nurse was sent upstairs to look and returned in alarmed distress. The baby was no where to be found! After several minutes' search someone remembered that the child had last been seen lying on one of the beds, and after a frantic search the little child was found smothered under the wraps of guests. The main reason why they had come had been forgotten, neglected, and destroyed! This Christmas many will forget, neglect and even destroy the Christ child! He is smoldered by the tinsel, wrapping paper, ribbon, and make-believe that surround the festive occasion.

Hasn't this child been under wraps long enough? Isn't it time that we stop hiding this child behind the packages and presents, the trees and tinsel? Isn't it time that we begin to spread the word among the shoppers and shop keepers that the thing to get excited about is not the bargains and sales but the birth of a Son? Isn't it time that we start turning our children and youth away from bright shining nose to the bright star over Bethlehem? Isn't it time that we stop rushing around spending money, and pause to spend time bowing down at a manger? Isn't it time that we stop the silence of the night with shouts of joy and celebration? Isn't it time that we join in with the angelic choir and announce to the world that something special has happened? Isn't it time that we refuse to allow the world to ignore the birth of this child any longer? For the Lord has chosen a sign, a sign that is given unto you, for the woman shall give birth, and his name shall be called Emmanuel. What child is this? This is the wonderful Counselor, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. This is Almighty God. And he shall be called Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.

So go forth no longer wondering what child this is. This child is your savior. Go forth and spread the word. Go forth and rejoice now and forever. Amen!