

What child is this?

The Child who came to save us!

Christmas Eve, 2021

Hebrews 1:1–8 (NIV84) ¹ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. ⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? ⁶ And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." ⁷ In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." ⁸ But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom."

It had been a rough year for husband and wife. Their engagement was smooth enough. Planning a wedding brought a normal amount of stress. Then life became more complicated. She showed up one morning with an announcement. "I'm pregnant." He took a step back. "Whose is it?" It wasn't his. Should he call off the wedding? After receiving a little advice from his Father, the wedding went on. Everyone in town knew about them and considered them outcasts, outsiders. Then the order came from the boss—you're going to have to travel. More stress. "How can we go? My wife is pregnant—she could have the baby any day! How can we pack up and move now?" But, they had no choice. Joseph cared for her as best he could, but the trip wasn't easy. As they approached their destination, the contractions started. "Where can we go?" He stopped at the motel desk and asked for a room. "Sorry. No vacancy." "Where can we go?" The baby was coming. Not much time. "Here's a place in this back alley. Smells like animals. It's no hospital, but it's quiet and safe." Pain. Worry. "Baby? Baby. Boy!"

In a moment they forget all about the stress and the struggle. As Mary holds the child in her arms, they examine him closely. Five fingers on each hand, and five toes on each foot. His nose is a little squashed, and wisps of black hair stick tight to his head. He looks like any other infant.

“What child is this?” they whisper to each other. Mary and Joseph already had the answer. The angel Gabriel told Joseph. **“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:21 NIV). Gabriel promised Mary: **“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end”** (Luke 1:32–33 NIV).

Joseph and Mary knew the answer to the question because God gave it to them. Today people around the world pause to celebrate Jesus’ birth. Christmas cards have his picture on the front cover. Christmas songs on the radio, and Spotify, and Pandora praise Christ the Lord. Nativity scenes shine in front yards. If we asked the average person on the street, “What child is this?” we would hear more answers than we could count. “Jesus? He was a good man...a great teacher...a philosopher...a demon...a prophet...Son of God.”

Is there any proof? A birth certificate would come in handy. It confirms the child's name, where he was born, and who the parents were. God provided plenty of identification for his Son. **“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways”** (Hebrews 1:1-2). The Old Testament prophets filled in the title section of the certificate. Moses called the child **“the Prophet”** (Deuteronomy 18:15). David called him **“Priest”** (Psalm 110:4). Isaiah called him **“King”** (Isaiah 9:6-7). Micah said his birthplace would be **“Bethlehem”** (Micah 5:2). God's prophets had plenty of information, but they couldn't fill in the blank with the names of the child and his parents or his date of birth. God filled in the rest of the information on the birth certificate when he sent Jesus, his Son, into the world. His parents’ names were Mary and Joseph. They gave him the name the angel shared with them: “Jesus”... “He Saves.”

God has so much to add about this child. He's not just a wrinkly, crying baby. He is the **“heir of all things”** (Hebrews 1:2)—everything belongs to him. He is **“the radiance of God's glory”** (1:3). We can't stand in God's presence, because God warns us, **“No one may see me and live”** (Exodus 33:20). Jesus came so we can stand in God's presence, see his glory and live. He is **“the exact representation of [God's] being”** (1:3). The child isn't like God. He IS God. Jesus told his disciples, **“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father”** (John 14:9). Because he IS God, he is also **“sustaining all things by his powerful word”** (1:3). The sun comes up in the morning and goes down in the evening because this child is in control. I woke up this morning, heart beating, lungs breathing, because this child is in control. What child is this? Jesus’ Bible birth certificate assures us that he is true God, clothed in our humanity.

Parents have expectations for their newborn child. Sometimes the expectations are realistic—“Maybe he'll grow up to be just like his father.” Sometimes the expectations are a bit lofty. Marv Marinovich, a former NFL player, had those expectations for his son, Todd. A *Sports Illustrated* article from February 22, 1988, said, **“When Todd was one month old, Marv was already working on his son's physical conditioning. He stretched his hamstrings. Pushups were next. Marv invented a game in which Todd would try to lift a medicine ball onto a**

kitchen counter. Marv also put him on a balance beam. Both activities grew easier when Todd learned to walk.” That dad had pretty high expectations for his son.

God the Father had pretty high expectations for his Son. He not only entrusted him with **“all things,”** he entrusted him with the plan to save us. What child is this? **“He...provided purification for sins”** (Hebrews 1:3). A baby? Purification for sins? Sounds crazy, but Jesus did it. He fulfilled every part of the Old Testament law, from his circumcision on the 8th day to keeping the Passover each year. Jesus did it all. Once he had lived a perfect life, he offered the perfect sacrifice for sin. Isaiah pointed to that sacrifice: **“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:6 NIV). Jesus offered his own life on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Who is this child? The one who came to live and die for us.

Every birth brings with it a moment of sadness. We know that from the moment life begins, one day it will come to an end. No child has ever lived, died, and then come back to life forever. Wait, let's change that. Only one child has done that. What child is this? Jesus!

The writer to the Hebrews said, **“...He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs”** (Hebrews 1:3–4 NIV). Mary's baby died and he is alive again. Today our ascended Lord Jesus sits at the right hand of his Father as the highest authority. He is superior to the angels, God's mighty servants. Angels do some pretty amazing things. They announced the birth of Jesus, sang praises to God as the shepherds listened. God has sent them to protect us, and they have done just that. Sometimes they even rescue us in amazing ways.

Angels are powerful and important. This child, Jesus, is better than all the angels. The author concludes: **“But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy”** (Hebrews 1:8–9; Psalm 45:6–7 NIV). Jesus is the perfect ruler. He holds the King's scepter in his nail scarred hands, ruling over everyone and everything on earth, in heaven, and even in hell.

What child is this? He is God. He is Savior. He is King. So what? What difference does this child make for me right now? My life is a mess. I have a pile of work on my desk. The house is a mess. My kids, what am I going to do with my kids? Wouldn't it be so much easier if Christmas was just about decorations and presents and food and parties? Wouldn't it be better if Christmas was just another December holiday and we didn't have to wonder who we might “offend” if we wish them “Merry Christmas”? What good is a child in a manger?

What does life without Christmas look like? Solomon described it like this: **“I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun”** (Ecclesiastes 2:10–11 NIV). My job, my house, all my toys and gadgets, and the trophies can't bring hope. Jobs can go away as quickly as they came. In a

moment fire or wind or flood can destroy my house. Toys and gadgets don't put food on the table. Trophies are just memories of empty, faded glory. Without Christmas, without a Savior, without Jesus, our lives are meaningless. None of it can provide any lasting hope. We are left with nothing beyond this life, **“but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God”** (Hebrews 10:27 NIV).

What child is this? He's the one that brings hope for people right now! Remember how John described him? **“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 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”** (John 1:9,14 NIV). The glory of Christmas isn't in a stable, or a manger, or even strips of cloth for diapers. The glory is in God made flesh. That's the miracle of Christmas. Maybe it's because I'm getting older, but every Christmas brings a deeper, more satisfying joy, even as we face a challenging new year. Every year that comes to a close reminds me I am a child who will one day die. The closer I come to the end of life, the more this child has to offer as I kneel before his manger. What child is this? He is Jesus—our God. He is Jesus—our Savior. He offers light in this dark world. He promises life beyond death for all who believe in him. There's a beautiful Christmas carol that expresses the marvel of our salvation from the angels' perspective as they announce the birth of King Jesus. Listen to the words:

Before the marvel of this night adoring fold your wings and bow, then tear the sky apart with light and with your news the world endow, proclaim the birth of Christ and peace, that fear and death and sorrow cease. Sing peace, sing peace, sing gift of peace, sing peace, sing gift of peace.

Awake the sleeping world with song, this is the day the Lord has made, assemble here, celestial throng, in royal splendor come arrayed. Give earth a glimpse of heavenly bliss, a teasing taste of what they miss. Sing bliss, sing bliss, sing endless bliss, sing bliss, sing endless bliss.

The love that we have always known, our constant joy and endless light, now to the love-less world be shown, now break upon its deathly night. Into one song compress the love that rules our universe above. Sing love, sing love, sing God is love, sing love, sing God is love.

I pray that the marvel of Christmas is yours today and always. Amen.

To God alone the glory! Pastor Jon Brohn