



## December Sermon Series: What Child is This?

### Message #1: Awake

#### Getting the Nod

#### Skit: What Child is This... Awake!

**In 1865, an Englishman named William Chatterton Dix** penned the words to a poem entitled "**The Manger Throne.**" A few years later the first three stanzas of that poem were set to the music of an English traditional folk song called "**Greensleeves**" that soon became known as the beloved Christmas carol "**What Child Is This?**"

This combination of poetry and music first was **published in the United Kingdom in 1871 as a new song** when it **debuted in a prestigious compilation of Christmas music called Christmas Carols Old and New.** For close to a century and a half the question found in the title of this carol has become an annual reminder that something significant happened on that night in Bethlehem as someone significant lay wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger. This child would change the world forever; but what child is this?

The title of the carol, "What Child Is This?", **is intended to be the primary question the shepherds must have asked on the night they visited the baby Jesus.** After they were awakened by their angelic encounter and after receiving the startling news while they tended their sheep on the outskirts of Bethlehem, **their heads must have been spinning rapidly.** They tried to comprehend all they experienced on that first Christmas night.

**Transition:** Luke's Gospel records the scene in chapter 2, which was the passage read during the wreath ceremony. I am going to read from the same text starting at verse 13...

#### Connecting Us

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:  
14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" 15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

**Transition:** While no nativity scene is complete without the shepherds' presence, subsequently, the answer to this Christmas Carol's question starts with a "shepherd." Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd!!!

#### What's God's Take on This?

### What Child is This? (He's the...)

#### 1. The One Who came to lay down His life.

- **Look at NKJV | John 10:11** "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

- **THE BOTTOMLINE:** This is a summary statement of what this child in the manger came to be for all people. **He is the one who came to lay His life down for all of humanity just as a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**
- **REWRITING THE ROLE OF SHEPHERD:** While at times the shepherds in the Christmas story have been labeled as the ones who were a bit rough around the edges and living on the lowest rung of society's ladder, Jesus describes Himself as being a shepherd who has great responsibility.
- **THERE'S NO GREATER RESPONSIBILITY than holding the life of another in the control of one's own hands.** Protecting their own sheep and the sheep of others was the sole responsibility and calling of the shepherd.
- **SO, IT SEEMS APPROPRIATE TO ANSWER THE QUESTION, "WHAT CHILD IS THIS?" A SHEPHERD WHO CAME TO LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR OTHERS.**
- **Illustration of Denise Peraza in the San Bernardino Shooting:** 2015 San Bernardino shootings, 27-year-old Denise Peraza. Her life was spared, not because the shooters saw her and turned the other way, but because a valiant man named Shannon Johnson shielded her body with his own and saved her life. Denise said "I will always remember his left arm wrapped around me, holding me as close as possible next to him behind that chair. And amidst all the chaos, I'll always remember him saying these three words: "I got you." Those are Christ's words when He said, "I will never leave you or forsake you!"

## 2. The One who came to provide for and protect His flock.

- **ANOTHER PRINCIPLE DUTY OF A SHEPHERD** was to make sure the animals that were under his or her care **had enough food and water.** David's most famous poem speaks to these priorities in Psalm 23 that begins with truth that echoes the answer to the question of the carol: What Child Is This?
- **Psalm 23:1-2:** NKJV | Ps 23:1-2 **The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.**
- **NOW LOOK AT VERSE 4:** NKJV | Ps 23:4 **Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**
- The good shepherd goes to great lengths to take care of those under his or her care. He would make sure they were kept intact and would go the extra mile to make sure one that was lost was looked for until it was found as Jesus taught in His parable of the lost sheep found in Matthew 18:10-14.
- **ANOTHER LOOK AT OUR GOOD SHEPHERD'S PROTECTION:** NLT | Mt 18:10-14 **"Beware that you don't look down on any of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father. 12 "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? 13 And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn't wander away! 14 In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father's will that even one of these little ones should perish."**
- **HE DROPPED HIS OWN PROTECTION TO PROTECT US:** What child is this? He is the one who left all the riches and comfort of heaven to look for the ones who went astray. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one of us—to our own way. The mission of the shepherd is to look for and rescue the ones who are lost.

This is what a good shepherd naturally does. This is who this child in the manger would grow to become.

- **Illustration of the Children's Pastor's Miracle in a Forest Fire:** The Children's Pastor saw a fire on a Sunday morning coming up the mountain ridge and called one of the other children's pastors to tell him we would not be at church because of the fire. I asked him to pray. He prayed, and also asked the Sunday school children to pray for us. Many kids came forward and agreed in prayer that the fire would not touch our home. That day the fire burned very quickly, traveling down the canyon toward our home at speeds of up to 50 miles per hour. It came all the way to our house, with temperatures nearing 2,000 degrees. It blew out our propane tank and burned right up to within four feet of our house on all sides. But it went around the house, and continued burning, leaving the house unharmed. Prayer works!!

### 3. The One who knows His sheep and they know His voice.

- **HE'S THE ONE WHO WANTS US TO LISTEN TO HIM:** NLT | Jn 10:1-5 "I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! 2 But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. 5 They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice."
- **AND WHO IS THE THEIF AND ROBBER?** NLT | Jn 10:10 The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.
- **SATAN IS THE THEIF AND ROBBER:** He tries to snatch us away from the life that was intended for us by the one who watches over us and owns us through His blood.
- **Illustration of a Father and son at an orchestra concert:** We must tune our ears to hear God's voice. It's like the child who was told by his father during a symphony orchestra concert, "Listen for the flutes in this song. Don't they sound beautiful?" The child, unable to distinguish the flutes, looks up at his father with a puzzled look, "What flutes, father?" The child first needs to learn what flutes sound like on their own, separate from the whole orchestra, before he is able to hear them in a symphony. So it is with us as children of God. **Unless we take the time to hear his voice in the quiet moments of life, we will not be able to hear him in the symphony sounds of life.** Stephen Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church* (Baker Books, 1999), p.63

### 4. The One who is the Good Shepherd.

- NLT | Is 40:10-11 Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in power. He will rule with a powerful arm. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes. 11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.
- IN John 21, Jesus asks Peter if he loved Him. And each time John answered with a "YES", Jesus replied as the Good Shepherd with these directives: Feed My Lambs; Tend My Sheep; and Feed My Sheep.
- **AS JESUS WAS PREPARING TO LEAVE US** He was acting most like a Good Shepherd... making sure the disciples and those who would in the future become

followers of His, would also become shepherds to our families... our friends... and to the lost sheep around us.

**Transition: What Child is this?** You may ask?

### Takeaways

He is the one who came to lay down His life.

He is the one who came to provide for and protect His flock.

He is the one who knows His sheep and they know His voice.

He is the one who is the good shepherd.

His name is Jesus, the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger, just as the angel said he would be.

And as we leave together as fellow shepherds... go and tell everyone what you have heard, what you have seen, and what you have experienced because of this child is, just as the shepherds did on that first Christmas in Bethlehem.

**Transition:** I close with this...

### Drawing the Net

**Final Illustration:** Tim Keller: Why Christmas Matters. If Jesus didn't come, the story of Christmas is one more moral paradigm to crush you. If Jesus didn't come, I wouldn't want to be anywhere around these Christmas stories that say we need to be sacrificing, we need to be humble, we need to be loving. All that will do is crush you into the ground ...

[But] if the Christ Child is actually God come in the flesh, you're going to know much more about God ...

- He gave us a 500-page autobiography.
- And our understanding will be vastly more personal and specific than any philosophy or religion could give us.
- [Because of the Christmas Child] look at what God has done to get you to know him personally.
- **Christmas is an invitation by God:** Look what I've done to come near to you. Now draw near to Me. I don't want to be a concept; I want to be a friend.

Tim Keller, "Why Christmas Matters," Relevant Magazine (12-10-11)