



¹⁵He saith unto them, **But whom say ye that I am?** ¹⁶And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. ¹⁷And Jesus answered and said unto him, **Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.**" (Matt 16:15-17)

There were not many minds that were wondering about the identity of the baby Jesus as He lay in a crude manger that first Christmas night. In fact, most of the world was sleeping and completely unaware of His coming. Only certain souls knew: of course, Joseph and Mary knew; the shepherds on the hills overlooking Bethlehem knew (they learned from Heaven itself); the Wise Men knew – and even some beasts of the stables knew. But even the quiet little village of Bethlehem was mostly unaware of His coming as they slept and dreamed. No angels appeared over the king's palace in Jerusalem to herald the birth of Jesus, nor did Rome have the slightest notion of what great event was transpiring (though Caesar Augustus had unwittingly been complicit in bringing Mary to Bethlehem that the prophecies of His birth might be fulfilled). *¹ And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. ² (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) ³ And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) ⁵ To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.* (Luke 2:1-5)

All of the powers of Heaven and earth combined to bring about this event as God had ordered it. The great constellations of Heaven shook and realigned; the kings of the earth took note of the small, still voice which, though they understood not, they obeyed believing it to be their own volition; and even the humble beasts of the field made room in the stable for the greatest and most timeless event of epic proportions ever to occur in the space-time-matter continuum in which all of the world and universe exists.

"What Child is This?" was not a question that even came to mind that night in the hearts of almost the entire world. Only a few souls of humble, and kingly, birth were granted the privilege – lowly shepherds, and princely Wise Men from the East.

The lyrics of the song were composed by William Chatterton Dix in 1865 (also author of 'As With Gladness Men of Old') and the tune is the popular old English Greensleeves in the key of E Minor – one of the saddest of keys. But this carol turns the sadness of the key to a majestic joy with its heavenly refrain: *"This, this is Christ the King, whom Shepherds guard and angels sing, etc"*

What child is this, who, laid to rest

*What child is this, who laid to rest,
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
while shepherds watch are keeping?*

Refrain:

*This, this is Christ the King,
whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
haste, haste to bring him laud,
the babe, the son of Mary.*

*Why lies he in such mean estate
where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here
the silent Word is pleading.*

Refrain

*So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh,
come, peasant, king, to own him;
the King of kings salvation brings,
let loving hearts enthrone him.*

Refrain

"What child is this, who laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?" Of course, the opening line of this deeply moving carol begs the question of each of us, *"What Child is This?"* Have you heard the angel chorus deep in the secret chambers of your heart herald the birth of this Child who would be King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Have you come to know the Child who was born in a stable, laid in a crude, wooden manger, and later died on a crude wooden cross for you and me as the Lamb of God without blemish slain from before the Foundation of the world?

The best rest that our Savior ever enjoyed was perhaps this rest upon the lap of His mother Mary. Though He was Savior and King, to Mary, He was more – He was her BABY that she loved above her own life as do most mothers. But the birth of no child born of man had ever before been heralded by the Voice of the Angel of the Lord accompanied by a choir of the Heavenly Hosts. This was no ordinary Child though He came for very ordinary men!

"Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding? Good Christian, fear: for sinners here the silent Word is pleading." Why, indeed, was Christ born under such austere and humble circumstances? In order to suffer the wages of sin

for the meanest and lowest of men, it was necessary that Jesus come trailing no clouds of wealth or opulence. He had to be as low as the lowest sinner in circumstances of living, though He was the only man born of woman who was completely devoid of the taint of sin in His life, in order to relate to man and redeem his soul from Hell. Without the salvation made available through the substitutionary death of Christ, man is not a whit better than those oxen and asses of the stable yard in old Bethlehem. The soul without Christ perishes as does the death of the beasts of the field. *19 For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. 20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. 21 Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?* (Eccl 3:19-21) The "silent Word" is that still small voice that always pleads the sinners cause and exhorts him to turn to that Rock of his Salvation which is Christ.

"So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh, come, peasant, king, to own him; the King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him." If a handful of kings of the East came to bow the knee and pay homage to Christ, that number cannot compare to the number of kings and royalty who have since bowed the knee to the Sovereign of all Sovereigns and King of all Kings! The day approaches when every soul – both king and serf – will bow the knee either in terror and fear, or in exultant joy! During those days, there were wise men from the East (whether kings and princes, or religious scholars, I know not) who came following a heavenly Star. These were most likely, in my opinion, the priests of the Zoroastrian religion of Persia since the title of their priests is Magi. There are some historical proofs on clay tablets of that country that record Zoroaster's counsel to his followers to study the heavens - for a Star would herald the coming of a great king above every other. If this is relevant to the Magi, then perhaps they studied not only the heavens, but the writings recorded by the Hebrew prophets. *He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.* (Num 24:16-17)

The wise men came bearing costly gifts worthy of a king, a Diety, and a Funeral. Please note not only the nature of gifts, but acts of worship that the Wise Men paid to Jesus: *And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.* (Matt 2:11) Note that they did not simply reverence Jesus as another royal figure, but they WORSHIPPED Him – a small baby. The gifts of GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, and MYRRH bear a peculiar significance to Jesus. Gold was the medal of royalty, and Jesus was, as King of Kings, entitled to that honor. This may have been given in such ample amount as to pay for the family's later subsistence in Egypt. Frankincense symbolizes worship. The incense burned at the Temple Altar represented the prayers of the people rising up to God in Heaven. Myrrh was a resin exuded by a tree peculiar to Arabia which was used for embalming the dead. So these three gifts were totally prophetic of Christ. He was born King of Kings, He was both God and man worthy of being worshipped, and, like mortal man, He would die the same death that all men must die withal a sacrificial one.

In order to rule as King, the King needs a palace. In order to be worshipped, the Lord needs a Temple. In order to be a Savior, One who is the only worthy must die for all who are unworthy. If Christ is your King, you have enthroned Him in the Palace of your Heart. If He is your Lord, He has become Lord of your soul and your whole being

is His Temple. If you have received Him as your Savior, you have been washed clean by His Blood; have replaced that old self-will that was in bondage to sin with His perfect Will which is the Law of Liberty!

The question posited in the first line of the hymn is answered fully in the Refrain: *This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing; haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary.* This innocent Baby born at Bethlehem in a stable is the Lord and Savior who was destined to come by the councils of Heaven in Eternity Past – long before the worlds were formed. He is not only a King, but King of all Kings! Though mighty in His Majesty and Divinity, yet He regarded Himself of no greater estate as to commune with lowly shepherds – but also kings, and the angelic hosts. The ‘laud’ we are to bring to Him is highest praise.

We truly can give God nothing of material value, but we can give Him our Hearts into which He will come to live forever.