



## What Child Is This?

December 10, 2023

Our perception of the birth of Jesus is often tied to a calm, quiet nativity scene on a Christmas card. But the reality of the nativity was far from peaceful.

*Matthew 2:18 — “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.”*

The Christmas carols and cards don't accurately portray all that was happening at the birth of Christ and afterwards. But most are still committed to keeping their perception of Jesus bolted down to the manger scenes of the Christmas cards. In doing so, they miss much of the truth of what really happened.

Many tend to view Jesus as an adult the same way they view Him as a baby.

*Matthew 10:34 — “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”*

Seven hundred years before Jesus came, the prophet Isaiah writes:

*Isaiah 9:6 — “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forever more. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this.”*

This passage seems to indicate that when the Messiah comes, He will bring about His kingdom in fullness including spiritual, political, social, and physical peace. The Prince of Peace has come, but the world at large is still not experiencing peace.

While nearly every biblical prophecy has historical application in either the immediate or near future of the prophets, the ultimate burden of all prophecy is the coming of the Messiah, the Day of the Lord (God's judgment on the earth), and the Messianic Kingdom to follow. Modern Christians most often “major” in the prophecies that point to the first coming of Jesus and “minor” in the prophecies that speak of His second coming. However, far more prophecies address the second coming than the first.

Isaiah 9:6-7 speaks as if the primary purpose of this Child is to vindicate Israel over and against her enemies. Yet the Child has come, but the remainder of the prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. Israel is still oppressed and wars continue. So how are we to understand such passages as this?

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve sinned and paradise was lost. But God promised that one day, He would send a Deliverer to fix what was broken and restore paradise. This Deliverer would defeat the devil, provide forgiveness of sins, and bring mankind back into relationship with God. This Deliverer would redeem all of creation and bring back paradise.

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a vision of a great image with a head of gold, a chest of silver, thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. Then he saw a stone, cut out without hands, which smote the image on the feet and ground it to powder. The wind swept away the dust “so that not a trace of them could be found.” Then, the stone that destroyed the image became a great mountain that filled the whole earth [Daniel 2:31-35].

*Daniel 2:44-45 — “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its*

*interpretation is trustworthy.”*

From the Old Testament perspective, the coming of God’s Kingdom was viewed as a single great event: a mighty manifestation of God’s power that would sweep away the wicked kingdoms of human sovereignty and fill all the earth with righteousness. This is not what was happening, but it is what was expected by the Jews during the earthly ministry of Jesus, which is why many did not think He was the Messiah.

The truth is, the Kingdom is yet to come in the form prophesied by Daniel when every human kingdom will be displaced by God’s Kingdom. But something happened that was not clearly foretold, called “The Mystery of the Kingdom.”

The mystery is that this very Kingdom of God has now come in advance to work among men but in an utterly unexpected way. In the spiritual realm, Jesus now offers to men the blessings of God’s rule, delivering them from the power of Satan and sin. The Kingdom of God is not forced on anyone, yet it is offered as a gift that can be accepted or rejected.

The parables of Mark 4 and Matthew 13 illustrate the mystery of the Kingdom, that the Kingdom of God which is yet to come in power and glory is actually present among men in advance in an unexpected form to bring to men in the present age the blessing of the age to come.

Those who receive the Kingdom now not only become citizens of the Kingdom before it comes in fullness, but they also receive peace.

*Romans 5:1 – “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”*

He is the Prince of Peace for all of us who have come to know Him, but He hasn’t brought His kingdom into fullness yet. That will come when He comes again. He comes *now* to offer forgiveness of sins and peace with God. He *will* come again to wage war, bring judgment, and make political, social, and physical peace on the earth.

Jesus came with an offer and a demand. He came to offer the Kingdom of God to all who will choose Him as their King. He demands from us a decision to follow Him. But since that is a choice everyone is free to make or not, that means there will be division over that decision.

*Matthew 10:34 – “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”*

After introducing this radical idea, Jesus illustrates it in a few ways. First, he wants to show one thing that frequently occupies this ultimate and high place in our lives other than God, one of the false kings that he wants to dethrone. To our surprise, especially at this season, it’s family.

*Matthew 10:35-39 – “For I have come to turn a man against his father, daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

Jesus calls us to sacrifice ourselves willingly, die to ourselves, put aside our own desires, dreams, goals, and ambitions, and put Him first. It’s a paradox. It’s counterintuitive and certainly countercultural, like everything else in this passage. But you can’t negotiate with Jesus. Cross-bearing means death to self. It means that my life, will, ambitions, desires, and hopes are all given to Christ. It means that I count myself as dead so that Christ may live and reign in me.

Make the resolute decision to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus. Choose to follow the King and submit to His rule and His Kingdom.