

What Child Is This? : Wise

How does a song that was written in 1865 and published in 1871 become a classic

while another song is nearly forgotten to history? Why do certain songs have staying power and others don't? A song that has stood the test of time and has been a standard for over a century is the song *What Child is This?*

This song was written as a poem in 1865 called *The Manger Throne* by William Chatterton Dix. A few years later, the first three stanzas were set to the tune that we know it by, *Greensleeves*, and it was first published in 1871 in a compilation called *Christmas Carols Old and New*. For close to a century and a half, the question found in the title of this carol is our reminder that something significant happened on that night in Bethlehem as someone significant lay wrapped in swaddling cloths in a manger. This child would change the world forever. So we ask and seek: What child is this? It's the primary question of the Christmas story and really of our faith. And every character is seeking an answer to that same question: what child is this? Last week, if you were to join us online or on Wednesday night, it was the shepherds. What child is this that the angels appeared to announce his birth? What child is this that the angel song rang over the hills? What child is this that we felt so compelled to abandon our flocks and make a bee-line for Bethlehem? The answer is that that child was one of them, a shepherd. But he was and is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for all of God's people.

This text this morning from Matthew's gospel isn't typically one that we pull out

during Advent. It's usually reserved for afterwards since this season of Advent is all about anticipating the birth of Christ. That's not how our scripture begins today. By the time the Magi or Wisemen or Zoroastrian explorers show up, Jesus has already been born. There's even some critical scholars who think that the Magi didn't show up until

Jesus was about two. But regardless of when this happened in the life of Jesus, it is still an impactful moment in his young life and as we know from another beloved Christmas song, foreshadows the rest of his life.

The question becomes for us this morning, though, why are we reading this text on the second Sunday of Advent instead of waiting until after Jesus is born? Well, it's because the wisemen help us find the answer to our Advent focus. They shed a little more light on to what child this is. These are learned men, students of philosophies, cultures, religions, and even the night sky. So, when the sky showed them something new and different, it was worthy of investigating. A new star was shining brightly in the sky, and they just had to follow it. "What child is this," they ask. What child is this that his birth interrupted the entire cosmological order and caused a new star to rise in the sky? What child is this that a star led us from the ends of the earth to behold him? What child is this that was born king of the Jews and shook Herod to his core?

They find the child and his family and they are moved to worship. This child is the one who has been born true king of the Jews. They offer him gifts that make no sense of the child that he is but are perfectly suited for the man he'd become. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold for the king that he is, frankincense for the priest that he is, and myrrh for the sacrifice he'd become. In their action, in their arrival, and in their presentation, they show us who this child is and who this child is to become. Here in this visit of the magi, the wisdom of God is on full display.

These wise men would come and be present with Jesus and Holy Family. And that Godly wisdom would continue to follow Jesus all the rest of his days. By the time we get to Luke's gospel reading today, Jesus is a twelve-year-old boy and by the Hebrew law

he lived under, he was a son of the law. He's old enough to make the journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem. He's old enough to participate in the activities of Passover. And he's old enough to create quite a stir for his parents and the whole world as the wisdom of God is again on full display.

Jesus gets himself separated from the convoy on the way back to Nazareth, and

he takes a place in the temple. During Passover, it was customary for the scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests to be present in the temple to discuss matters of theology and law in the Hebrew world with any and all who were present. And Jesus takes his place among this gathering. And it's important to note that Jesus wasn't a wallflower; Jesus wasn't just taking it all in. No, Jesus was actively participating in the conversation. He was asking questions, giving interpretation, and imparting wisdom beyond his years. He's there (instead of where he technically should be), but he's there. Luke's gospel says that people were amazed at his understanding and his answers. His parents were less impressed, but that's a different story.

So, what child is this? He's the one who is full of the wisdom of God, true wisdom. He's the one who doesn't just keep that wisdom to himself but spreads it with scribes and Pharisees, these people who would grow to be greatly annoyed by Jesus and his infinite wisdom. He shares it with the crowds gathered in the temple that day when he was twelve and the crowds that would travel the countryside when he's an adult. He imparts that wisdom to his disciples and all who would call on his name.

And he shares this wisdom with all of us, which may be the best news of all.

Because the fact of the matter, friends, is that we are going to go through something this week that doesn't make sense, that is tough or challenging or heartbreaking. And God

has given us our own wisdom for those moments. God has given us intelligence and reasoning abilities. And we can lean on those in the situations we face to a point.

But then comes something else. Something out of left field that leaves us bewildered and broken. It's then that we discover what child is this. And we discover the wisdom of Christ. Doesn't it give you a measure of peace to know that no matter what we face in life, we're not left abandoned to our own devices which so often fail us? Doesn't it give you a measure of peace to know that this Jesus who impressed the crowds and disrupted the order of the stars at his birth is with us? What child is this? He is wisdom. And thanks be to God!