

1.2.2022 Christmas 2 (Isaiah 61:1-3)

“What Child is this?” It’s not a question we just started asking ourselves during our processional hymn this morning, it’s a question that’s been at the center of every service for weeks. “What Child is this?” Week after week through the season of Advent our Scripture readings gave us the answer. The appointed readings through Advent were all about miraculous signs that point to Christ: “*Signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars*” (Luke 21:25). Signs made manifest in His miraculous works: “*The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them*” (Matthew 11:5). As the weeks passed, through these Scriptures we learned that the most important lesson in Advent is how to recognize our Lord.

The season of Advent is complete, but as we study the appointed readings through Christmas and into Epiphany we notice the focus hasn’t changed. These passages continue to center on God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, revealing Himself to His people. Our question is, What Child is this, and Jesus continues to answer that question in personal and miraculous ways.

What Child is this? It’s a question that demands a response. For 2,000 years the world has argued about who Jesus really is, and we argue because as hard as some may try, a serious, thoughtful person just can’t ignore Him. The truth of who He is must be addressed, and this morning we will address the truth of His identity by considering the words of the Epistle appointed for this Second Sunday after Christmas.

Our Epistle is found in the book of the prophet Isaiah (61:1-3), and in the Gospels we learn that this is the passage Jesus read when He returned to His hometown of Nazareth. When He went into the synagogue, as was His custom, on that Sabbath day, and stood up to read, Jesus said, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*” (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus returned to His hometown on that day with the answer to the question, “What Child is this?” His fame had spread through all the region, all the signs pointed to Him, and at that moment He claimed the work of the promised Messiah as His own, saying, “*This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears*”

(Luke 4:21).

On that day in His hometown, Jesus made a bold claim about who He is, He claimed to be the promised Messiah, and the people responded with these words, *“Is not this Joseph’s son?”* St. Luke tells us that at first, *“everyone spoke well of Him,”* and that they were *“amazed by the gracious words that came from His lips”* (Luke 4:22), but their initial response of surprise and admiration was soon replaced by a spirit of unbelief. Here was their opportunity to repent, believe, and be saved, but just like the crowd that would only see a stubborn donkey as the Son of God rode triumphantly into Jerusalem, all these people would allow themselves to see was Joseph’s son.

Their choice, their unbelief, caused them to be so offended by His words that Luke tells us they *“were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong”* (Luke 4:28-29). The contrast between Joseph’s son, Jesus, an uneducated peasant from Galilee that earned His daily bread by the sweat of His brow, and Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, the Promised Messiah, was offensive to them. God, in the Person of our Lord Jesus, revealed Himself to the people of His hometown, but their hardened hearts wouldn’t accept the Truth, and their solution to this problem was to *“thrust Him out of the city... cast Him down headlong.”* Silence Him.

What Child is this? To the people of Nazareth, Jesus was simply Joseph’s son. He returned home to bring the Good News to them, yet His hometown rejected Him, or in the words of St. John, *“He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not”* (John 1:10-11). The people of Nazareth could have had Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Word who was with God in the beginning, the Word who was God in the beginning, now clothed in human flesh, but instead they chose Joseph’s son, and this choice came with a consequence.

The Gospel of Mark offers a parallel account of these events, and it’s there that we read about the consequence of their unbelief. St. Mark tells us that because the people lacked faith, Jesus *“could do no mighty work there...”* (Mark 6:5), and as we consider what we might learn from this example, one thing is clear, if our desire is for our Lord to do a *mighty work* in our lives and in His Church, then we must recognize who He is, and we must place in

our faith entirely in Him. We must invite Him to not only be our Savior, but Lord of every aspect of our lives, knowing that there is nothing of eternal importance that we cannot do, no place we cannot go, no life we cannot touch, in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ who strengthens us.

What Child is this? God has answered that question, Absolutely and Sacrificially, by sending His only-begotten Son to be born of Mary, to take upon Himself our nature, to live and die and rise to new life for the Redemption of the world. Now every one of us must answer the same question by the grace of God through faith. May our faith be the evidence that we recognize Him, not as one of many ways, but as the only Way, not as our truth, but as the Truth, not as a means to a better life, but as the eternal Source of Life itself, and not only as Joseph's son, but as "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16).