

# What Child is This?

## Part 1

### Colossians 1:15-20

#### **B. I.: Knowing God begins with embracing the true identity of His Son.**

Speak to any number of people on the street this Christmas season and you will be hard pressed to find anyone who says they don't like Jesus. Everybody "likes" Jesus! Parents like Jesus because He is such a wonderful moral example to their kids. Children like Jesus because of the wonderful stories and songs about His birth with Mary and Joseph, angels and shepherds, and animals around the manger. Salesmen like Jesus because their profits soar during the holiday season. Preachers of every stripe like Jesus because without him they would be out of a job. And Politicians like Jesus because their constituency is made up of parents, salesmen, and preachers who might not vote for them if they didn't say they like Jesus.

But it's not just individuals who would say they like Jesus. Even satanic cults and major world religions say they like Jesus. For example, The Mormons like Jesus because they think he demonstrates the potential that all men might someday achieve. They say, "As man is, God was; as God is, man may become." To them, Jesus is the highest human example of the possibility of becoming God.

The Jehovah's Witnesses like Jesus for a similar reason. He is the perfect example of the perfect man. He is a model to emulate whose character and virtue they strive to achieve in the hope that Jehovah might one day smile upon them and grant them the privilege of becoming one of the 144,000 redeemed.

The Unification Church loves Jesus because as they see it He demonstrated how to be a Messiah to a confused people who need the kingdom of God to come to earth. The Hare Krishnas love Jesus because they think He is their great guru. To them, "Krishna means Christ" and Jesus was the Master preacher of "god consciousness." Even the Muslims like Jesus because they see Him as one of the major prophets of Alla, on the same level with Noah, Abraham, David, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, and one step lower than the final and greatest prophet of all, Mohammad.

At Christmas time, everybody (with few exceptions) likes Jesus. Everyone but the hardened atheist likes the manger scene, the pageantry, the lights, the decorations, the gifts and the music! And who wouldn't like Jesus? I mean, as long as you can think of Him any way you please, and speak of Him as one who came from your favorite heavenly or earthly place of origin, for whatever purpose best supports your personal beliefs, why wouldn't you like Him?

But I wonder. I wonder, if the truth about Jesus' true identity, place of origin, and eternal purpose came to light in an authoritative manner, how many of those who say they "like Jesus" would suddenly hate Him? Well, I suppose you only have to look at

those fateful events of the original “Good Friday” to verify what would happen. The same hatred that hung Jesus on the cross would explode upon the church all over again.

During the Christmas season we all sing that beloved Christmas hymn entitled “What Child Is This?” That’s not only a good song title, it’s a good question. Is he the Mormon child, the Jehovah’s Witness child, the Hare Krishna child, the Muslim child, the “child of your own understanding”? What child is this? Who is this One called Jesus of Nazareth?

I think that’s a tremendously relevant question given the cultural revelation taking place in our country. And it is not just a question for these “Post-modern” times either. No, this was a question that people were asking even back when Jesus was alive.

- A. Mat. 21:6-11 On Palm Sunday when Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem like a newly inaugurated king and the people laid their coats and palm branches in His path, Matthew tells us that “all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."
- B. Mark 4:39-41, The disciples were in a boat with Jesus when a violent storm broke upon them. Jesus then stands up and tells the wind and the waves “Hush! Be still!” and the lake became as smooth as glass. At this the disciples, Mark says, “became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”
- C. Luke 5:21 When some men tore through the roof to lower a lame friend before Jesus in hopes that he would be healed, Jesus said to the man “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?”
- D. Luke 7:44-49 When Jesus was at the dinner and the sinful woman came and broke a bottle of perfume over his feet and wiped them with her hair Jesus said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven.” Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?”
- E. Luke 9, Even Herod became curious about Jesus’ identity and asked, “who is this man about whom I hear such things?”
- F. Jesus knew that everyone was asking the same question, and He was concerned that the disciples get it right. So in Mat. 16:13-17 Jesus asks them “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?”

This, beloved, is the most important question you will ever answer. And it is a question that the Lord not only posed to His disciples, but one that He lays at your feet this morning. “What child is this?” Who do you say Jesus is? Eternity hangs on this question.

By it many will be crushed under God's just and eternal wrath. And by it some will be brought to eternal life. "What Child Is This?"

It seems to me the only place we can go to learn the right answer to this question is to the writings of people who actually knew Him. Matthew and John knew Him personally. Mark and Luke wrote on behalf of others who knew Him personally. But since I am limited by time this morning, I want to narrow our focus to the writings of one who came to know Him after His resurrection; namely, the apostle Paul. He once wrote a short letter to the church in at Colossae, and in one short section of this letter (just 6 verses) He reveals the answer to our question with truth so profound and wonderful it may provoke us to be lost in wonder love and praise of Him for eternity.

This is a great place to find the answer to this question, because Paul was writing to a group of believers who were being assaulted by false teaching about the identity Jesus. Some were teaching, as many do today, that Jesus could not be thought of as God in flesh. In our day, there are a thousand different explanations for why "the Man Christ Jesus" could not possibly be God. But in that bastion of Greek philosophy where Colossae was located it was believed that Spirit is good but flesh is evil. Therefore, God could not become man because it would mix spirit with flesh, good with evil, and that was, philosophically speaking, intolerable nonsense.

Paul knew, however, that such teaching was a damnable distortion of the truth and would lead many to hell. So he wrote, at least in part, to correct this false teaching about the identity of Jesus.

Our text is found in the NT book of Colossians, chapter 1, verses 15-20. With it the apostle Paul crushes the most significant false teaching about the identity of Jesus Christ, even in our day. And by it, we learn six (6) essential truths about the identity of the child who was laid in a manger on that first Christmas morning.

What Child is This? Let's stand together and read.

Read Col. 1:15-20

What child is this?

## I. He is the Image of God (15):

Read v. 15

1. It's ironic that some of the modern cults use this very passage to show that Jesus was not God. They suggest that the phrase "image of the invisible God" shows that Jesus was nothing more than a created being who bore God's image.
2. But that's can't be Paul's point. To the contrary, Paul is explaining what it is that makes Jesus different from us mortals. If Paul is saying that Jesus "bore" the image of God, he is

not saying anything different than what Moses said of man in Genesis 1:27, that all humanity in Adam and Eve were created in the likeness of God. We are “image bearers”.

3. Paul, however, did not say that Jesus “bore” the image of God. He said that Jesus “IS” the Image of God.

4. The Greek word for Image here is eikon. It means “perfect replica, a precise copy, a duplicate” Paul is saying that God Himself is fully manifest in the Person of Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus said in John 14:19, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”

5. Everyone who has a computer knows what the word “Icon” means. They are the little images on your desk top that represent the invisible program behind it. If you want to create a document in Microsoft Word, for example, you go to the “icon” for that program and click on it and the entire program with all of its complex and powerful tools opens before your eyes like magic.

6. This is a crude illustration of the relationship between Jesus and God. There is no way that you can get to God except by the “eikon” of God, who is Jesus Christ. For He Himself has said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.”

7. Throughout the Bible God is said to be invisible. John 1:18, says, “No one has seen God at any time” God told Moses, “You cannot see my face, for no one can see Me and live! (Ex. 33:20). When Paul wrote to Timothy, he called God invisible (1 Tim. 1:17). And here in Col. 1:15 Paul makes reference to “the invisible God”.

8. Who is Jesus, then? Jesus is the One who makes the invisible God visible. In 1:19 Paul says that “It was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him”. He is not just a shadow of God or a picture of God, He is the fullness of God!

9. The author of Hebrews speaks of the same truth in different words when he writes (1:3) that Jesus is “the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature.” Then in Col. 2:9, Paul makes it about as explicit as words can make it by saying, “In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.” In other words, Jesus is God.

10. What Child is this? First of all, He is the Image of God. But secondly, Paul reveals that...

## II. He is the Son of God (15):

Read 15 again

1. Now again, people who know little about how to study the Bible and have no regard whatsoever for the original language, will take this phrase to mean that Jesus was a created being like everyone else. But that is not at all what Paul is saying.

2. The Greek word here for “firstborn” is *prototokos*. It is an unusual word in the N.T. It refers not to a person’s family lineage or origin, but to his rank. “The “firstborn” in a Hebrew family was the heir, the ranking one who had the rights of inheritance. And in a royal family, the *prototokos* had the right to rule.”<sup>1</sup>

3. You see, Paul is making the point that Jesus is not like other man. Though He was indeed a man He was also the *eikon* of God and therefore holds the rank of “firstborn”, the One who inherits not only the church (v. 18) but all of creation as well. Of all princes, rulers and heirs born on earth or created in heavenly places, He is the highest ranking of all.

4. We know this was Paul’s meaning because in verse 18, he writes, “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the (*prototokos*) firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

5. We see this term also used in the First Testament. Psalm 89:27 God says to David, “I also shall make him My first-born, The highest of the kings of the earth.”

6. When Paul says that Jesus is the *prototokos* (the firstborn) he means (to use the words of 1 Tim. 6:15) that Jesus is “the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.”

7. All of this is simply to say that Jesus is God’s Son. It’s not that He was a created being no different from man or angels, but that of all living beings He is the highest ranking of all. He was the man who is God. He is God in flesh; incarnate Deity. The Son of God.

8. And by the way, the Jews understood what Jesus meant when he called Himself the Son of God. John 5:18 “For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.”

9. It was fitting, then, that after His birth, wise men from the east should come to find this one who had been born King of the Jews. They didn’t know everything there was to know about the glory of this child, but they saw His star in the east and that’s all it took to prompt them to pack up their camels, leave everything, and make a dangerous, months long journey to find Him, worship Him, and give Him the best of what they possessed.

10. What child is this? He is the Image of God, and the Son of God. But notice third that...

### III. He is the Power of God (16-17):

Read 16-17

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *God With Us*, p. 91

1. If any question remains about the meaning of verse 15, these two verses decisively put it to rest. The eikon of God who is the prototokos over all is none other than the Almighty Creator God Himself.

2. This Jesus is not merely a part of creation, He is the Creator! And what is it that He created? All things!

A. The Mormons say Jesus is Michael the archangel. But angels were created!

B. The Jehovah's Witnessess say Jesus was nothing more than a perfect man. But even a perfect man would have been nothing higher than a created being!

C. The apostle's very point is that Jesus was neither of these things! He is, from all eternity, "very God of very God."

3. In Genesis 1, Moses revealed that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In fact, all three members of the Godhead had a part in creation. And Paul is saying here that of those three, this Jesus was One.

4. The apostle John said the same thing (1:3) "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." So when a Jehovah's Witness comes to your door and begins telling you that Jesus was only "a god" whom God created, show them in their own Bible that this cannot be. Because John says, "apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." If it was created, Jesus created it, because He is God.

5. Notice too, that all things were not only created through (by) Jesus but "for" Jesus as well.

6. You know the reason modern man cannot make heads or tails out of the seemingly infinite universe that our world floats in? It's because his underlying premise is wrong. He believes the lie of the psychologist, (that everything exists for me), or the lie of the atheist, (that everything is purposeless and accidental).

7. Paul is telling us that both of these views are dead ends. The reason we cannot understand or explain the universe is because it was not ultimately created for us. It was created for Christ! It was God's gift to His Son! It all makes perfect sense to Him and He is glorified by every minute element of it! He existed before any of it, He played a major role in creating it, and it was designed to give Him pleasure. It was designed to reveal His glory.

8. Not only that, but look at who Paul credits for making sure the universe doesn't simply fly apart. (v. 17) "He is before all things and in Him all things hold together."

9. Again, Hebrews 1:3 confirms this truth. The author writes that Christ "upholds all things by His powerful word". You want to know what keeps the whole thing from flying apart? Scientists don't know the answer to that. They simply call it the "strong force". But we know what holds it all together. The Lord Jesus Himself upholds it all with His powerful word. He made it; He upholds it; and some day, when He is done with it, he will

fold it up like an old garment and throw it away. Then He will create a new heaven and a new earth for all who belong to Him. No wonder on the day of His birth a multitude of the heavenly host appeared to announce His arrival. The very glory of God (a blinding light) exploded in the dark sky before to the shepherds in the field. And they cried out praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will to men with whom He is pleased.”

10. What Child is This? “This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing!” “Veiled in flesh the God-head see; Hail the incarnate Deity.” He is the Image of God; He is the Son of God and He is the very Power of God.

11. And yet there is more. He is also the Majesty of God, the Fullness of God, and the Lamb of God. But you will have to come back next week to learn about that.