

Who is this child? Why is this child?

*They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.
Luke 2:16 (NLT)*

Who among us doesn't love Christmas tunes? Whether they're songs about Rudolph, Santa, the Little Drummer Boy (who, by the way, the Gospel writers forgot to mention in their telling of our Savior's birth!), or the cherished Christian hymns we sing on Sundays; the songs of the season are as integral to our preparation and celebration as our living room's lit trees, the North Pole's elves, or our mantel's cherished nativities. There's just something magical about Christmas music. They're timeless, immune to political correctness, and somehow possess the power to soften the hearts of even the most skeptical scrooges among us.

I'm sure we all have our favorite seasonal songs. I have many, but if pressed to pick my personal chart-topper I'd have to say it's that old familiar hymn that first hit charts in 1865. That's the year that William Dix—a "one-hit-wonder" insurance company manager from Bristol, England—decided to express his Christmas spirit by penning the enduring classic *What Child Is This?* For me, his timeless lyrics, set to the tune of Greensleeves, captures the joyous yet mysterious magic of Christmas like no other. Have you ever taken the time to ponder Mr. Dix's beautiful lyrics? If you haven't, in the spirit of the season, I highly recommend you do so!

You see, within the song's three short verses, Mr. Dix gets to the heart of what young Mary and Joseph must've pondered as they looked upon the manger where their newborn baby boy lay sleeping: "Who are you? What does life have in store for you?" The young parents surely wondered at the strange events leading up to their boy-child's birth and their wonderment only grew as complete strangers gathered at the manger to share in their intimate moment. And you know what? Our world, 2000+ years later, still ponders the same fundamental question concerning this baby in the manger: "Who are you?"

On second thought, perhaps our 21st century fundamental manger-side question isn't so much "*who* are you?" but rather "*why* are you?" You see, unlike Mary, Joseph, and the rest, you and I know how the story ends. Therefore, as we gaze upon the child in the manger, we see the King of kings lying beneath the shadow of the cross. Our fear—meaning awe and reverence—in the presence of the holy child flows from our knowledge that this new life, the Word made flesh, is God's gift to us. We know what his bewildered, yet adoring parents couldn't have known: that even from the manger this fragile baby was already protecting us from sin and death. Knowing what we know, we're all the more struck by the humble, shabby conditions of his birth and the lowly social status of those who first welcomed him. That must be the case because twenty centuries later all of us—the richest and the poorest among us, the wisest and the simplest—still kneel as paupers before the throne of God's grace, for that's what this manger is.

My prayer is that each of us will not let this season pass without peering into the manger and asking, "*Who* are you? *Why* are you?" And then, listen closely for the answer: "*I'm your Savior and I've come to save you.*"

Loving Father, grant me the humility to hurry to you this Christmas season so that I too may kneel before your manger-shaped throne of grace. AMEN.