

December 2, 2007  
Houghton Lake UMC

**What Child Is This?**  
Revelation 5:1-8

Advent  
Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming

The book of Revelation is really the end of the story—the culmination of some 10,000 years of redemptive history, and the culmination of the church era—the time of the Gentiles and the preaching of the gospel to the world. What we read in our text today is the scroll and the Lamb, the heavenly revelation of the Savior of the world. It is a direct reference to the Pascal lamb of the Passover recorded in Exodus at the time of Moses, representing the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. It is also a direct reference to Jesus' death on the cross in the New Testament, as Jesus became the true sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. The picture of our text today is a proclamation of Christology, as we find that “the lamb” is the only one worthy to open the scroll, because the lamb is the only one without sin. It also represents the culmination of God's salvation work and the beginning of the end of this “old” world. The new heaven and the new earth will come at the end of God's great judgment, but for now a celebration is in order.

God's salvation of the human soul actually started with Genesis and the prophet Moses when he recorded the curse of Adam and Eve in Genesis, Chapter 3. That judgment was one of curse as well as mercy, the rejection of sin and the promise of redemption. In other words, when God cursed Adam and Eve, He was saying to them, “Today, the judgment .... but I have a plan.”

We find that plan in the golden strand of prophecy and promise, woven throughout the Old Testament—hidden at first and then more boldly pronounced as the Old Testament unfolded. We also find the plan in the New Testament as it addresses the profound question, “What child is this?”

“What Child is this?” is the defining question for every human heart to answer, whether it was asked 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem, or if it is asked today.

But 2,000 years ago every Jewish scholar had a problem. They thought Messiah was only coming once! Every Jew knew the prophecies, but did not know they were referring to two or maybe three separate events.

Therefore, people like Simeon, Anna, Mary, Joseph and even wicked King Herod would have known the golden strands of hope written in the Old Testament scriptures about the coming “Anointed One”—the Messiah. They would have been aware of the narrowing circle of promises God had given to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. They would have known of the promises God had given to King David. And, they all would have grappled with the seeming contradictions revealed by the prophets, contradictions that seemed to offer two different pictures of the coming Savior of the world.

It is only through the eyes of the Christian who today can look back through history by the experience of Jesus Christ that we can tell the true difference between these two golden strands. It is because that within these prophesies of the Messiah run two rivers of revelation, parallel and intertwined. For instance, most of the Jews understood Isaiah and the birth scriptures. **Isaiah 7:14:** “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. **Isaiah 9:6:** “For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” They also understood **Isaiah 11:1-3:** “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding...” (Jesse was the father of King David, and they knew that the Messiah would be called the son of David.)

And, what about **Psalms 2:6-8:** “I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.” I will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.” And, verse 12: “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way.”

**Isaiah 32:1-3:** “See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. Each man will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land. Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen.”

The New Testament people would have known these scriptures well, because the Messiah was going to fulfill their dreams of redemption and rule as a king forever. They would have known about the Righteous Branch of **Jeremiah 23:5**: “The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the Land.”

Every Jew looked forward to the day when Daniel’s vision would come true in **Daniel, Chapter 7** when he declared (verse 13), “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him....”

They also would have known where the Messiah would be born. Most spiritual Jews knew **Micah 5:2**: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

The hope of the Messiah had surged when Jesus was born and rumors flew through the country about shepherds who witnessed angels singing and going to see the newborn baby in the crowded stable. But, rumors flew all of the time in Israel and especially during the Roman occupation, and of course, many babies were born in Bethlehem.

All of these scriptures were well known in Israel because they promised a reigning king. They promised a hero that would bring deliverance from their pain and oppression. How good it would be to have a ruler whose kingdom would never end and who would cause all of the other nations to bow in reverence and truth! Then their faith would be vindicated and they themselves exalted, because they knew the truth.

However, I also believe that the scripturally-educated Jews of Jesus’ day knew another story about the Messiah which confused them, because the second picture of the Messiah emerging from the Old Testament scriptures is most disturbing. These scriptures describe a suffering servant.

All put together, these prophecies describe in detail Jesus' sufferings on the cross. Not even the disciples themselves understood that Jesus would have to suffer and die. The suffering Servant motif begins with the first promise from the lips of God, when He cursed the serpent. **Genesis 3:15**: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

**Psalm 22** becomes the next great picture of the suffering servant, as David foreshadows Christ on the cross with the words, "My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?" Psalm 22:18 was specifically fulfilled as it says "They divide my garments among them and casts lots for my clothing." The Roman soldiers did this very thing at the foot of Jesus' cross, and yet they probably did not know the Jewish scriptures.

**Psalm 69:21** also brings out the suffering of Jesus as it says, "they put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."

And, what about **Isaiah 50:6**: "I offer my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard." **Isaiah 52:13-14**: "See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness". **Isaiah 53:3**: He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

All of these scriptures surround Jesus' suffering and death. They are scriptures that the Jews did not want to see or hear. And, they did not readily understand these scriptures to be referring to their Messiah.

You see, no one wanted to look upon these scriptures because they told a story of brokenness and defeat. No one wanted a suffering servant, because what good would he be? In their understanding of the coming of Messiah, how could they reconcile the scriptures that proclaimed a reigning king with scriptures that portrayed a suffering Servant. Weren't these contradicting pictures? Weren't they irreconcilable?

No one knew Christ would come twice. This was a lesson even for the disciples of Jesus. The Jews thought that when the Messiah would come, all messianic prophecy would be fulfilled at once. This is one reason, even in the face of all of Jesus' miracles, that the Jews rejected Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah. The argument still stands in today's Jewish community that the lion does not lay down with the lamb, so how could the Messiah have come already? The answer is this: Jesus came once as a suffering Servant to save us from our sins, and he will come again as the reigning King, and the whole world will then bow to him.

Christians know that the suffering Servant has already come. His name is Jesus of Nazareth, better known as Jesus the Christ, the Messiah of Israel, the Lamb that was slain at the foundation of the world. He is known as the Redeemer, the Branch, the Servant, the Anointed One, the Prophet. He died a physical death on a cruel cross and was raised from the dead after three days, and ascended into Heaven after 40 days. Today he sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From there he shall come to judge both the dead and those who are alive at his second coming.

Because someday he will come again as the reigning King and fulfill the prophecies of the other golden thread woven in the tapestry of God's word, Jews and Christians alike are looking for his second Advent. We should know these scriptures well as we wait for his coming glory and share with the world the hope that is ours.

What child is this? The suffering Servant, the one who came to die, the Lamb that looked as if it had been slain, who made the covenant of communion which we celebrate.

The next time he comes, he will come as the reigning King. You and I will be a part of that great event if we have repented of our sin and surrendered to his Lordship in our life. And what a day that will be!

Let us pray:

Thank you, Jesus, that today we are people of the covenant -- people with the knowledge of your redemption and the promise that you will come again! In your name we pray, Amen.