

Advent: Joy to the World

And His Name Shall Be Called...

Isaiah 9:3-7

Mark Vroegop

*You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, **and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this (Isa. 9:3-7).*

The apostle Paul casts this vision of Jesus in his letter to the church at Philippi:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

We're not told what this name is, exactly, but we see the effects: every knee bows and every tongue confesses.

The apostle John cast this vision of the people of God in the new heavens and the new earth:

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:3-5).

The name of God on the foreheads of God's people, marking them as his own.

Throughout the Bible, a name is incredibly important:

- God names Adam; Adam names the animals and names his wife Eve (Gen. 1-3).
- Jacob's name is changed to Israel after he wrestles with God (Gen. 32:28).
- When Moses encounters the burning bush, he learns the personal name of God: I AM / YHWH (Ex. 3:14).

- The father of John the Baptist, Zechariah, surprises everyone when he finally scribbled the name “John” on a tablet, ending his inability to speak (Luke 1:57-67).
- Joseph is told that the baby in Mary’s womb will be named Jesus because “he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:20-22).
- Jesus invites his followers to pray “in his name” (John 14:13).

I could give you many more examples. It’s obvious that names are important in the Bible. What’s more, the reason that they are important is because of what the names mean. Names are connected to who a person is. A name can summarize your identity.

What’s in a name? A name can communicate a person’s character or characteristics. A name can send a message as to what a person is like. And that is what we find in Isaiah 9 today.

We are walking phrase by phrase through this historical statement about the Messiah. The first week of Advent we looked at the historical context and the phrase “unto us a child is born; to us a son is given.” I invited you to keep your eyes on the horizon. Last week we looked at “the government will be upon his shoulder.” And the central idea was that trusting in Jesus is a much safer and sure foundation than anything in this world.

This week we’re going to explore four names or titles that are listed in rapid-fire succession: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. We’re going to examine what these names mean individually and then also consider how they fit together.

The Gaithers have a classic song where the first line goes like this: “Jesus, Jesus; There’s just something about that name . . . Kings and kingdoms will all pass away. But there’s something about that name.” Well, there’s something about these names. And I wonder if you might consider and look for what you need today, and how you might find it in what’s described here. There’s something about these names.

Called

Before we get into the specific names, it would be helpful to understand that when the text says “his name shall be called” it’s not just referring to a passive description. In other words, Isaiah 9 is not merely informing you as the reader. To be “called,” in the sense of this verse, is to be proclaimed and heralded. It’s the same word used in Isaiah 40:3, “A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” It’s not just a name or description. This is an announcement with implications.

Let me give you an example. The titles “husband and wife” have a lot meaning to them. You might meet a new couple and in the process of making introductions, they might say “This is my husband, Jim.” The term husband explains their relationship. But there was a day when the terms “husband” and “wife” were used not only for the first time but were also communicated in a particular way. A wedding officiant said something like, “It is my honor to pronounce you husband and wife.” In that moment, the titles were a representative summary of the entire wedding service and their vows.

Another example is when a child is adopted into a family and receives a new last name, or maybe you earn a promotion at work that comes with a new title signifying this important promotion.

These names and titles are filled with hope.

Wonderful Counselor

The first name on the list tells us that the Messiah is someone to whom we should listen and someone we should follow. Remember that Isaiah 9 is set in the historical context of a complex and challenging world. Assyria is the major world superpower, and Ahaz is under enormous pressure. To the north, Israel and Syria are putting pressure on him to join their alliance. To the south, he has military incursions from Edom and Philistia. What is he supposed to do?

Ahaz failed. He put his trust in an alliance with Assyria even though God invited him to request a faith-building sign. And the promise here is that there will come a leader who will have the wisdom to know what to do. He will be called “Wonderful Counselor.”

The Hebrew word for “wonderful” means more than just pleasing or satisfying. It means something extraordinary and amazing. Wonderful could mean mysterious or perhaps miraculous. Isaiah uses the same word in Isaiah 25:1, “O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.”

“Wonderful” describes the kind of works that characterize God. They are otherworldly and supernatural.

To call him counselor means that he is one “who speaks and urges certain directions of actions or thought.”¹ The idea here is someone who can lay out a plan that is full of wisdom and effectiveness. Someone with miraculous insight and with instruction on how God’s people should live.

This, of course, points us to the New Testament and what we learn about who Jesus is:

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

... in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3).

We can take heart that Jesus is working out a perfect plan for the universe and for our lives. We can look to him for those times in which we need wisdom. And we can rest knowing that he’s everything we need for life and godliness. His name is Wonderful Counselor.

¹ James Swanson, [*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew \(Old Testament\)*](#) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

Mighty God

This name might be considered similar to other names like Ezekiel, which means “God will be my strength,” or Isaiah, which means “God is our salvation.” In this context, it could mean “God is mighty” or “God is a mighty warrior.” So, it’s a name for Immanuel, but it’s a name that is reflective of God’s empowerment of him.

God is described in terms that sound like this:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe (Deut. 10:17).

Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! (Ps. 24:7-8).

It seems that this name associates the Messiah with the power and deliverance of God. Jared Kennedy writes:

He's the one who will wield his sword against all the injustice we face in the world. He'll punish those who rob the poor and needy among his people. He'll vanquish all who practice iniquity . . . At Christmas, we remember how Jesus came in humility to save us from our sinful participation in this world's injustices. But we also look forward to the day when our warrior king will come again to punish every evil doer who remains in his or her sin. On that day, he will right every wrong. The gentle savior born on Christmas will rescue his faithful remnant from all this world's oppression.²

The mighty Messiah will defeat every enemy. He will not only rescue his people, but he will bring judgment upon all those who have rebelled against him. He is the mighty God like the children’s Sunday School song says, “My God is so big; so strong and so mighty. There’s nothing my God cannot do.”

Everlasting Father

This name is two words in English, but only one in Hebrew. It can mean “my father is eternal,” or it could mean “father of eternity.”³ Isaiah uses it later in his book in reference to God’s sovereign control and authority over the nation:

But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand (Isa. 64:8).

² Winfree Brisley and Jared Kennedy, eds., *Unto Us: 25 Advent Devotions about the Messiah*, (Columbia, MO: TGC, 2024), 67.

³ Gary V. Smith, [Isaiah 1–39](#), ed. E. Ray Clendenen, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 241.

The psalmist used the term to capture God's care for his people or children:

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him (Ps. 103:13).

The role of a father is to be someone who exercises God-given authority in a way that reflects God-like compassion. I know there's no perfect father, and I also realize for some there is a lot of hurt connected with what a father should have been. But the reason Isaiah uses this term here is that it's the best way to describe a tough and tender figure. Someone who loves, laughs, directs, disciplines, praises, corrects, provides, and helps us. Jesus said, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:8). And the apostle John is stunned with the love that comes to us from him: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are . . ." (1 John 3:1).

Isaiah describes the Messiah not only as a father, but as an everlasting father. His protection, care, love, provision, and affection will never run out. He'll never back out. He'll never walk out. He will always care for you. He'll always protect you. He'll never go broke. He'll never leave you or forsake you.

And because of Jesus, there's coming a day when these words will be true:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:3-4).

His name will be Everlasting Father.

Prince of Peace

The final name in this list reflects the end-game for the Messiah. He's the one who will bring what, at times, seems illusive at best or impossible at worst: peace.

You might be familiar with the Hebrew word for peace, "shalom." In Hebrew, the word "shalom" doesn't mean just the absence of conflict or a place of quietness. It is about completeness or something being whole. The opposite is when life is falling apart. Or when the complexity of the created order makes everything seem disoriented. Shalom is when everything is in the right place or when it's restored.

It means that there's a deep sense of completeness. There's a sense that this is the way things were meant to be. And the Messiah is the one who will make all of that possible. It's no wonder why the angels made this announcement at the birth of Jesus: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14). It's also why the book of Revelation begins with these words: "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come . . ." (Rev. 1:4).

Peace, shalom, completeness, and wholeness. This is what we long for. Yet it's so hard to achieve, and it's just as hard to keep and maintain. From a human standpoint, peace with God and with one another is impossible. We're too depraved and too corrupt. We need the miracle of divine intervention.

Peace, in this sense, is not just the absence of conflict. It's a state of wholeness and completion. Everything is the way it should be. If you've ever watched the *Waltons*, each show ends with the camera pulling back on the old farmhouse with music playing as you hear: "Good night, John Boy. Good night, Elizabeth. Good night, Daddy. Good night, Mary Ellen. Good night, Jim Bob. Good night, everybody."

We need peace, and it's the Messiah who makes it possible. He is the Prince of Peace.

What's in a Name?

What name do you need to be reminded about today?

- Wonderful Counselor: Jesus has supernatural wisdom. You can ask him to help you.
- Mighty God: Jesus is able to defeat everything evil and dark. You can hope in him to intervene.
- Everlasting Father: Jesus will always care for you. You can trust him.
- Prince of Peace: Jesus makes everything whole. You can follow him.

But he's not just each of these names. He is all that. And he's also all of them at the same time. Jesus doesn't have strengths and weaknesses. He has the full capacity of being everything we need.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22:13).

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