

Wonderful Counselor  
Isaiah 9:6  
November 28, 2012  
Advent Mid-week 1

*For to 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.*

Grace, mercy, and peace from the Wonderful Counselor, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

What's in a name? Shakespear said that a rose by any other name would still smell as sweet. The Israelites of Isaiah's day would probably have taken exception to that. In contradiction to Shakespear's idea, the Hebrew people attached a great deal of importance to a person's name.

In most of the ancient cultures, a person's name wasn't just how he was identified, it was a description of that person. A person's name was chosen to say something about that person.

The name Isaac means "laughter." Isaac's name referred to the cynical laughter of his mother, Sarah, when she heard she would give birth at 90. It also referred to the laughter of joy that came from Sarah and Abraham when Isaac was born.

Esau's name meant "harry one" because he was covered with red hair when he was born. Jacob's name meant "he deceives" and he spent much of his life wheeling and dealing to get ahead.

We find the most important descriptive name in the story of Moses and the burning bush. When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, God told Moses to return to Egypt and bring out his people. Moses asked: "*Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?*" (EX 3:13 NIV).

Do you remember what God told Moses to say? God said: "*I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'*" (EX 3:14 NIV). In Hebrew, I AM is Yahweh – the official name of God and the name that a Jewish person would never say because they felt they weren't worthy of speaking God's name.

I've given you this little explanation of Biblical names because, in our mid-week Advent services, we are going to look at four of the names Isaiah uses to describe the coming Messiah. These four names are Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Each of these names says something about the character, nature, and the work of Jesus. We will spend the rest of our time tonight looking at the first name – Wonderful Counselor.

The name, Wonderful Counselor, literally translates, “a wonder of a counselor.” To fully understand what that means, you must understand that this name is two separate thoughts joined together. Let’s look at these parts individually, then we’ll put them together for application.

The word Wonderful is the Hebrew word *pala*. It denotes something uncommon or something out of the ordinary. Basically, something that is outside the realm of human explanation or comprehension.

This same word is used by the David in Psalm 139, when he says: *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain* (Ps 139:6 NIV). When the Bible speaks of something being wonderful it is speaking about something that is miraculous.

Today, the word miracle is overused and has become somewhat jaded. We speak of miracle drugs or miracles of science. When the 1980 U.S. hockey team won the Olympic gold medal, some people called that miraculous. Of course we know these aren’t miracles – they’re mere human accomplishments.

But let me ask you, do you have a sense of wonder about Christmas and the Christ child that goes beyond human explanation or comprehension? Do you still gaze slack-jawed and wide-eyed at the babe in the manger? You should, because in that manger lies someone who is truly wonderful – someone who is beyond human explanation or comprehension.

The second half of this title for the coming Messiah tells us that he is our Counselor. In its historical Hebrew usage, the word Counselor referred to a king giving counsel and direction to his people during times of trouble. It gives the picture of a king who has a plan to deliver his people.

The prophet Micah used this imagery when he spoke about the Israelites in Babylonian captivity. “*Why do you now cry aloud – have you no king? Has your counselor perished?*” (Mic 4:9 NIV).

There was no leader, no king, no Counselor to give the Israelites a plan for getting out of bondage.

Unlike the Israelites of that day, Isaiah tells us that we have a Counselor. We have God’s Messiah and he has a plan. His plan involves releasing captives from the power and consequences of sin. This plan was first revealed in a garden, called Eden, when God told Satan, “*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*” (Ge 3:15 NIV). Our Counselor is Jesus and the plan is his.

Let’s take a look at the plan our Wonderful Counselor has for us. The plan starts with forgiveness of our sins. Sin is the one thing standing between God and us. Sin is our problem, but it’s not a problem that we can handle. Sin holds people in a captivity that no human can break. Correcting the problem of sin required a miracle, it required

something wonderful.

Our Wonderful Counselor came here to make that miracle a reality. Jesus removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. He made our scarlet hearts as white as snow.

Having our slate wiped clean, we can now enjoy the second part of the plan – eternal life. The forgiveness we have been given gives us the right to spend eternity with our Wonderful Counselor.

But that's not all. God's plan also includes the "here and now." Jesus said, "*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*" (Jn 10:10 NIV). The plan starts the very moment the first seeds of faith spring to life in a human heart. Those living under the plan of the Wonderful Counselor enjoy a life filled with meaning, purpose, joy, and fulfillment – not just in the future, but right now.

We live in God's plan when, by faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, we live by the wise counsel of the Sermon on the Mount; when we apply to our lives the practical wisdom of Jesus' conversations with his disciples; and when we heed the teaching found in all of God's Word. The plan of our Wonderful Counselor can bring every man, woman, and child into a renewed relationship with God, both now and forever.

This Advent season, take some time to stop and reflect on the wonder of wonders, the miracle of miracles that took place when God sent his Wonderful Counselor into our world. Then come to the manger. Stand there slack-jawed and wide-eyed as you gaze upon God's plan for your salvation in the flesh.