

Guess Who's Coming For Christmas?  
Mighty God! Isaiah 9:2-7  
Psalm 72:1-5, 17-19

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<sup>2</sup>The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. <sup>3</sup>You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. <sup>4</sup>For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. <sup>5</sup>Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

If you are not familiar with The Best Christmas Pageant Ever, by Barbara Robinson, you should be. A book, made into a television movie and now a musical, it is the story of the Herdman's -- "the absolutely worst kids in the history of the world"!

Why?

"They lied, and stole and smoked cigars (even the girls) and talked dirty and hit little kids and cussed at teachers and took the name of the Lord in vain. So it surprised just about everybody when they decided to take part in the Presbyterian Church's Christmas pageant."

"The Herdmans had never heard of the Christmas story, but the way they interpreted it, you'd think the story of Jesus came right out of the F.B.I. files. It was a Christmas pageant to remember." (from the back cover)

As it turned out, the Herdman kids all volunteered for the main roles: Imogene is Mary, Gladys is the Angel of the Lord. Ralph is Joseph and the other three boys--Leroy, Claude and Ollie--were the three wisemen.

One day at rehearsal, the director of the pageant told them:

"Now, you know you are not supposed to say anything. Nobody says anything in our pageant except the Angel of the Lord and the choir singing carols. Mary and Joseph and the Wise men make a lovely picture for us to look at while we think about Christmas and what it means."

"I think I ought to tell them what his name is," Imogene said.

"I told you!" Ralph whacked Imogene on the back. "I named him."

"Joseph didn't name the baby either", the director said. "God sent an angel to tell Mary what his name should be."

Imogene sniffed. "I would have named him Bill."

"What angel was that?" Ralph wanted to know. "Was that Gladys?"

"No," the director said. "Gladys is the angel who comes to the shepherds with the news."

"Yeh," Gladys said. "Unto you a child is born!" she yelled at the shepherds.

"Unto *me!*" Imogene yelled back at her. "Not them, *me!* *I'm* the one that had the baby!"

"No, no, no." The director sat down on a front pew. "That just means that Jesus belongs to everybody. Unto *all* of us a child is born. Now," she sighed. "Let's start again, and---"

"Why didn't they let Mary name *her own* baby?" demanded Imogene.

"What did the angel do, just walk up and say, 'Name him Jesus'?"

"Yes", the director said, because she was in a hurry to finish the rehearsal.

But Alice Wendelken had to open her big mouth.

"I know that the angel said," Alice piped up. "She said, 'His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.'"

"My god," Imogene said. "He'd never get out of the first grade if he had to write all that!" (p. 62-65)

It is a mouthful! God- or in this case, the promised son—has many names because each of the names informs us of a specific aspect of his character. Rather like a diamond with many facets, God is multi-dimensional in personality and character.

Today we consider the second of the names in Isaiah 9:7, "Mighty God".

That is a mighty big name for a little baby. Something to grow into. Like this name, baby boy was born on November 7, 1928 in a country home near Prosser, WA. That night Republican Herbert Hoover was elected president of the United States. The doctor attending this delivery was a Democrat who came in for a lot of razing because he was outnumbered by Republicans, and *their* man had won the election. He told folks: "That's okay, I just delivered a little "Herbert Hoover."

The baby's father was the foreman at one of the local fruit packing plants. The next day, female workers greeted him with a wicker baby basket full of gifts – their "bribe" – if he named his new son Herbert Hoover—he did! And Herbert Hoover Lobdell is with us today! He told me his story last week during the coffee time; I'm sharing it now with his permission.

That was a big name to live into! I think Herb has done it well!

Now *this* "son who is given to us" is named "Mighty God"!

Implicit in the word "mighty" is power and authority.

A baby who is powerful? Seems like an oxymoron. Yet the cry of a baby has the power to get a parent out of bed in the middle of the night.

The Psalmist describes God as having unbounded power. “Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.” (147:5)

Job confesses, “I know that You can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.” (42:2)

In the fuller biblical perspective God’s unbounded power can be best shown to be none other than God’s unlimited love.

**“God is not power in and of itself, but One who exercises power to liberate, and redeem a lost humanity...God’s power is best expressed in [his] suffering love. God loves us with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3) and therefore acts to save us. God’s anger is provisional, but God’s love is eternal (Isaiah 54:7-8).”** (Donald Bloesch, God the Almighty, p. 106-107)

We recall that at the time Isaiah prophesied, the nation of Judah was under the domination of the Assyrian empire. When Jesus was born, the Roman emperor ruled. The people were under the oppression of foreigners who ruled by force of power and might.

Kings were generally understood as those who derived their power from God. While not deity themselves, kings exercised or were considered “carriers of divine power”. The implication of this being that the king bore responsibility for the welfare of the entire realm. In other words, the rule of such a one would be characterized by victory in warfare, success in economics, productivity in agriculture, and by justice in social relations. (Walter Brueggemann, Names for the Messiah, p. 20)

To put a finer point on it, the psalmist says (72:18-19) that such a king will specifically exercise economic justice toward the poor and needy.

Early on—soon after Jesus’ baptism and temptation in the wilderness, he began his teaching ministry. Luke records this in 4:14-21.

<sup>14</sup>Jesus returned to Galilee in the *power of the Spirit*, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. <sup>15</sup>He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

<sup>16</sup>He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

<sup>18</sup>“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”<sup>[f]</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Then Jesus rolled up the scroll gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup>He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

### **That’s a wow-worthy moment!**

Do you remember what happens next? Jesus is rejected by his very own townsfolk who drove him out of town and attempted to stone him to death.

**So much for “mighty God”, right? Or perhaps Jesus is putting a different face on power and might. *Power and might are not physical force or military engagement. Jesus will re-define power. He will exercise power and authority, but “he will not compete with the power of Rome on the terms of Rome.”*** (WB, p. 23)

The Kingdom Jesus comes to establish is “not of this world”. **In contrast to the Empire, Jesus seeks to use power to transform and redeem; to give life not to destroy life.**

Among the many examples in the Gospels **we will briefly consider two in which Jesus exhibits the “mighty power” of God:** Mark 1:21-28 and Mark 4:35-41.

In the first, Jesus encounters a man who is under the influence of an “unclean spirit”. The dialogue is between Jesus and this spirit, who immediately recognizes Jesus, and who realizes that Jesus represents a threat to the spirit’s very existence.

**“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”** (v.24)

**This spirit identifies Jesus with the image and language of Isaiah 9.2, acknowledging Jesus’ divine power.**

Jesus authoritatively issues a double command: “Be silent, and come out of him!” (v.25) Helpless in the face of this authority, the spirit departs.

The man experiences a new lease on life, healing. The crowd who observes this drama responds:

<sup>27</sup>The people were all **so amazed** that they asked each other, **“What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.”** <sup>28</sup>News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. (Mark 1:27-28)

**A second** example, in Mark 4:35-41, Jesus **exercises his power over nature.** After a long day of teaching Jesus and the disciples are tired. They get in a boat and head out for an evening sail. Suddenly the wind whips up, and the disciples fear for their lives. In terror they awaken the sleeping Jesus.

<sup>39</sup>He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

<sup>40</sup>He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

<sup>41</sup>They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

In essence, Jesus speaks the same command to the unclean spirit and to the storm, both of which are life-threatening. The key word in both episodes is “obey”. Both the spirit and the storm that threaten chaos and death, submit to Jesus’ power and authority. Life is preserved.

Pope Francis said the following, in a TED talk last year (April 2017):

*“The more powerful you are, the more your actions will have an impact on people, the more responsible you are to act humbly. If you don't, your power will ruin you, and you will ruin the other.*

***There is a saying in Argentina: “Power is like drinking gin on an empty stomach.” You feel dizzy, you get drunk, you lose your balance, and you will end up hurting yourself and those around you, if you don't connect your power with humility and tenderness. Through [Christ-like] humility and concrete love, on the other hand, power—the highest, the strongest one—becomes a service, a force for good.”***

*Pope Francis, “Why The Only Future Worth Building Includes Everyone,” TED Talk (April 2017)*

One day, a bus driver was driving along his usual route. He didn't encounter any problems for the first few stops; a few people got on, a few got off, and things went generally well. At one stop, however, a big hulk of a man got on. He was 6' 8" tall, built like a wrestler, and his arms hung down to the ground. He glared at the driver and told him, "Big John doesn't pay!" Then he sat down at the back of the bus. The driver was 5' 3" tall, thin, and very meek, so he didn't argue with Big John. But he wasn't happy about it.

The next day, the same thing happened. Big John got on again, made a big show of refusing to pay, and sat down. It happened the next day, and again the day after that. The bus driver began to lose sleep over the way Big John was taking advantage of him.

Finally, he could stand it no longer. He signed up for body building courses, karate, judo, and a class on building his self-esteem. By the end of the summer, the bus driver had become physically strong and much more self-confident.

The next time Big John entered the bus and again declared, "Big John doesn't pay!" the driver confronted him, bellowing: “And why not?!”

With a surprised look on his face, Big John replied, "Big John has a bus pass." (PT.com)

God’s power and authority is not wielded by intimidation but by identification. By sending a son, to be like us, this “God with us”/Immanuel identifies with us in every way.

The writer of Hebrews says that the One whom God sent is able ...” to empathize with our weaknesses... One who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

Most human leaders who get a taste of power—who wield any degree of authority—do NOT want to share it and often abuse it.

In stark contrast, Jesus does not use power or intimidation to force his way into our lives. Rather, Jesus is a complete gentleman; he is patient and polite...saying:  
"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. "Revelation 3:20

Jesus awaits our openness to His presence; his desire is for a close, intimate relationship. The gift of this Son, given to us this Christmas, is at the same time, one who is vulnerable and one who is all powerful.

**Jesus embodies the life-giving power of transformation. How much this gift is needed today, in our world and in our lives?**

It is a miracle. It is a mystery. It is a matter of faith.

Guess who's coming for Christmas? Mighty God! Wow!

[Pray]