

READ: Isaiah 9:6 – 7, pg. 573

If there's one thing we have enough of, it's trouble. We have personal troubles: bills, health, career, the daily grind. The world has problems: political problems, crime, poverty, and more. We could use a lot more of a lot of things, but we don't need more trouble, right?

So, as Pastor Ray Ortlund says, "God's answer to everything that has ever terrorized us ... is a child."¹ Think about that. The passage that we just read says this:

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.
(Isaiah 9:6–7)

¹ Ortlund, R. C., Jr., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). Isaiah: God saves sinners (p. 99). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Judah was terrified by their enemy, the Assyrians. The Assyrians were not nice people. Isaiah tells them that God's answer is a child.

Birth announcements are wonderful ways of sharing and spreading joy. Some birth announcements go out soon after the baby is born, and others a bit later, depending on the organizational ability (and sleep levels) of the parents. But every single birth announcement I've ever received was sent after the baby was born. This one is different. It's sent *before* the birth — seven hundred years before.

The prophet Isaiah delivered it to the people of Israel while they were facing a threat from the growing superpower of Assyria (which would eventually destroy the northern kingdom of Israel and lead many Jews into captivity). Isaiah addressed this situation by promising the coming of a future King.

Most babies have just one name on their birth announcement. We would have been confused to discover that ~~my niece~~ had been given three distinct names. But Isaiah announces the birth of a baby with four names: "his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." One name wasn't sufficient to describe this special child.

Moreover, these names tell us what the baby will do. Imagine reading on a birth announcement, "Excellent violin player, marathon runner, future CEO of major corporation." Birth announcements don't list accomplishments. That's because there are none to list — apart from thumb-sucking, blinking, and drooling.

Parents would
love this

But, this baby is different. In fact, as Frederick Beuchner said The Hungering Dark:

“Once they have seen him in a stable, they can never be sure where he will appear or to what length he will go or to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation he will descend in his wild pursuit of man.”

For just a few minutes, I want to look at the four titles of Jesus in this passage and what they teach us.

1. AS THE WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, HE HAS THE SHREWDEST STRATEGIES. LET’S FOLLOW HIM.

The term “counselor” is not what we think of today in terms of a therapist, or someone we tell our problems – although Jesus is that as well. It’s more of a military strategist. It probably refers to a king who has the ability to come up with a winning military strategy. You could say “Extraordinary Strategist” (NET Bible).

Isaiah predicts a baby that will become an Extraordinary Strategist. Jesus is a Master Strategist, able to deliver his people from hopeless situations. Many of these situations are of our own making. Judah’s was. He is a strategist who can handle situations that look hopeless to us.

Jesus is the Master Strategist who can deal with our problems. These are the problems that keep us up at night – finances, health, job insecurity, family problems. Jesus came across people with all kinds of problems. He is not surprised by the messes we have, even the problems we get into. Jesus is the strategist who is not surprised, and who specializes in hopeless situations. He brings hope when there doesn't seem to be any hope. He is also able to deal with our ultimate problems, problems that we aren't even aware we have.

Got any hopeless situations? Got anything that you can't solve on your own? Tell him. He has never found a problem that he is surprised by, even if the problems are of our own making. God can deal with any problem you've got.

Jesus can even deal with our deeper problems. He came to forgive us, to bring us into his Kingdom. He came to reconcile us to God, to adopt us, to make us his own.

That is Jesus, the Mighty Strategist, the one who can deal with hopeless situations. The Lord has better advice for your life than anyone. It is amazingly and wonderfully different from the advice of the world. As the Wonderful Counselor, he has the shrewdest strategies. Let's follow him.

2. AS THE MIGHTY GOD, HE DEFEATS HIS ENEMIES. LET'S TRUST HIM.

When Isaiah wrote these words, Isaiah was facing one of its greatest crises. They faced enemies. What could they do? They had a hard time believing that they could trust God. What would be the strategy that would save them?

Isaiah counsels Judah to trust in God's strategy: trust a baby. You can see why Ahaz wouldn't have been too excited about trusting the baby.

Who will you trust? When the marriage is falling apart, where do you turn? When the finances are drying up, who will you trust? When things are going wrong, whom do we trust? We all trust someone – ourselves, some other person, some other thing to get by.

You can depend on Jesus, the Mighty God, against impossible odds. Even though we face impossible odds, and even though Jesus seems the most unlikely person to help us against the impossible odds, he is the one to trust. He is the Mighty God. He has all the power necessary for whatever problem you face. He is the one, the only one, who can help us.

3. AS THE EVERLASTING FATHER, HE TAKES FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR US. LET'S REST IN HIM.

Obviously, Isaiah isn't saying that Jesus is the same as God the Father. I don't think Isaiah was even thinking of the Trinity as he gave Jesus this name. Back then, the term father was often used of a king who protects and supports those under him with care and authority, like a father does his family.

This is what Isaiah is talking about. Jesus will be a king who protects and supports his people. He takes full responsibility for us — not just for a time, but forever.

Jesus is able to protect us today. There is nothing that he can't handle. He is able to protect us from anything. Jesus never gets tired by having to care for so many people. He never loses track of who we are. He is able to keep track of everything about you. The Gospels frequently speak of Jesus' compassion for people that he met. Jesus cares about you.

There is nothing in your life that Jesus doesn't know about. He cares for you, just like a good father cares for his family. That's what it means for Jesus to be the Everlasting Father.

You will never attend this Father's funeral. He will never get old and senile and leave you like an orphan on your own. No matter what you're facing today, take this to heart. He takes full responsibility for us. Rest in him.

4. AS THE PRINCE OF PEACE, HE RECONCILES US WHILE WE ARE STILL HIS ENEMIES. LET'S BOW BEFORE HIM.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace who is already bringing health and wholeness to people within his kingdom. You are part of a stream of wholeness and healing that is streaming across the entire world.

When Jesus was born, angels announced that this peace was coming to the entire world:

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!
(Luke 2:14)

The message of the angels has two parts. First, “Glory to God in the highest heaven.” Our first and main response to this message has to be praise. The Prince of Peace is worthy of our worship and our praise for the arrival of Christ, and for the kingdom he has started.

The angels also said, “on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” This peace is a gift from God. At Christmas, we can receive the gift of peace. This is a king who will ultimately receive our worship one day.

Not everyone worships him now. Not everyone joins his kingdom. But some do, and they get to enjoy peace.

As the Prince of Peace, he reconciles us while we are still his enemies. He came not only to be born, but to die for us. Romans 5:8 says, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” He invites you to trust him tonight for your salvation so that you can be reconciled to God through him.

Jesus gives us everything we need. Follow him. Trust him. Rest in him. Bow before him.

Beautiful Name
Silent Candle
O Holy Night
Joy