

# Advent #2 Prophecy and Faith

## Isaiah 9:6-7

We are now in the second week of the Advent Season. Traditionally this candle has been known as the Bethlehem candle, the prophecy candle or the faith candle. Some traditions move the prophecy candle to week 1 and link it with hope and expectation. For our purposes, I have linked prophecy with Bethlehem and faith.

For those of you who really know me, you know that instead of being drained by the holidays, I am actually energized by Christmas. I like the secular Christmas stuff and the religious Christmas celebrations. I also enjoy the giving and receiving of gifts. As I think about the gift-giving side of Christmas, I think I enjoy the anticipation part the most. I like being creative with the gift giving. I'm not talking about my anticipation of receiving gifts; I'm talking about all the preparation I put into giving the gifts. Since I know everyone in my house likes money, they all know they are going to get money, but the anticipation and excitement comes around how they are going to receive it. For example, last year, I was Pete the Pirate. I got a treasure chest, filled it with gold doubloons, other treasures, and a map. People had to find the treasure. Sometimes I hide the money in another present. It's fun to watch the kids and Luig rip through the presents looking for the money.

I know some friends who don't like to shop or think when it comes to giving presents to their wives. Finally I talked some of them into getting into the spirit of Christmas. After Christmas we all got together to process how their new attitudes went over. We asked one of our friends how Christmas went. He said, "My wife has not spoken to me since Christmas." We said, "Why? What happened?" He said, "Well, I did what you said and I asked her what she wanted for Christmas." She said, "Oh, just surprise me." So at three o'clock Christmas morning, ... I leaned over, ... and went, BOO!!!"

We said, "You're probably in for many more weeks, perhaps months of silence before this is over. Better get ready for a big Valentine's day."

On Sunday mornings, we have been studying through the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel tells the story of God's gift to humankind. Jesus is the gift God sent and Jesus brought with Him salvation and the Holy Spirit as gifts. We can only be made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross. Today, we are going to think about how God built up anticipation in us to receive Jesus. About 700 years before the birth of Jesus, God sent this message through the Prophet Isaiah to concerning Jesus' arrival. The prophet described the ministry and Person of Jesus:

"6For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7His ever expanding, peaceful government will never end. He will rule forever with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David. The passionate commitment of the LORD Almighty will guarantee this" (Isaiah 9:6-7 / NLT)!

What I would like to do today is discuss the Names Jesus is given in this prophecy. After the Christmas season, we will get back into the book of Luke. At that time, I would invite you to recall these Names given to Jesus 700 years before His arrival.

The first Name Jesus is given in verse 6 is Wonderful Counselor. We have used words like wonderful and awesome so much today, that its real meaning is so diluted, that it has lost its

power. We talk about wonderful meals, awesome sporting events. But the Hebrews were never confused concerning the word wonderful. They knew what it meant. Wonderful meant unbelievable, ... things that were beyond human understanding, beyond logic, beyond human possibilities or capabilities. Wonderful could only refer to God or something that only God could do. It describes the truly miraculous. Wonderful things are to awaken our sense of wonder. And this sense of wonder is meant to draw our attention to God.

Well, what is so wonderful about Jesus? First of all, it is wonderful to think that God, the creator and sustainer of the entire universe, could come to earth in the form of a baby. My mind cannot even begin to understand that. First of all, I can't even begin to imagine the power and force that is able to bring this entire universe into existence. And then to further try and understand this indescribable power in a baby is even one more step removed from my understanding. Yet the Apostle Paul says that the fullness of the Godhead rested in Jesus, ... in bodily form.

Let me share something wonderful about that thought as it applies to you and me. Sometimes I feel helpless when faced with difficult situations. The Bible says that when we become Christians, God's Holy Spirit comes into us. And He brings in the same presence and power of the fullness of the Godhead that lived inside of Jesus. Please think about the wonder of that gift this Christmas. But back to the description of Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor. Now that we have some idea of what the word wonderful means, let's apply it to Jesus as counselor. Counsel was very important in the ancient world. Based on counsel, kings would decide whether or not to go to war, how much to tax people, how to keep peace, and make legal court rulings. Good counsel was based on age, experience, and wisdom. For the Israelites, good counsel was based on knowing Scripture, and being able to apply it to everyday, practical situations. Many kings fell because of poor counsel and many kings were very successful because of excellent counsel.

If Jesus is indeed God, as the Bible claims, then Who could be a better counsel? He is eternal. Through Him all that exists was created. Since He is the creator, He intimately knows how we are put together. He knows what we need. He is the author of the Bible. Think about this as well. When we go to human counselors, we are there for about an hour or so, ... and then we have to leave the office, go, and try to implement all we have learned. Since Jesus lives in us, He goes with us everywhere. We have our counselor with us 24/7.

Today, we have the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the Wonderful Counselor. Sadly, we can't hear Him speak to us because we are proud, self-absorbed, stubborn, and arrogant. We don't really know our Wonderful Counselor because we don't know our Bibles. I wonder how many Christians have even read through the entire Bible in their lifetime.

If you are lost, and are in need of direction, meaning, and purpose in life; come to the Wonderful Counselor, Jesus. The next title of Jesus the Messiah is that He is the Mighty God. In Hebrew His title is El Gibbur. We have talked about these Names for God in our study through Genesis. El is the word used of God when talking about His power and His position. He is all-powerful. He is great. In fact, He is the One True and Living God. He is opposed to, ... and above all false gods, ... since they are no gods at all. His position is in Heaven and He rules over the entire universe as God almighty.

Gibbur is a military term that means valiant warrior; one who is brave, one who is powerful, one who is skilled at war.

Now let's put these two words together. But before we put these two words together, let me ask you a question, "Do you think that some of the suffering we go through in life is because of our pride, because we want to do it on our own?" You see, I think we often forget that life is all

about God. It's really interesting. In the book of Judges, we come across the character Gideon. In fact, this story is referred to just two verses before the verses we are studying through now. Gideon was called by God to lead Israel into battle. The enemy, the Midianites, had 135,000 well trained, well armed, and well seasoned soldiers. Gideon was able to muster up 32,000 pathetic, untrained, unarmed men to go up against this enemy. But Gideon had one more warrior, one more weapon on his side; The God of Israel. Gideon was a lot like us. He was shaky. He looked at things from a human perspective so we can imagine how he felt when God said to him, "Gideon, you've got too many men. Send 31,700 of them home." That left Gideon with 300 men. ... Oh ... plus God. God went on to tell Gideon that He wanted to make sure they didn't take credit for the victory.

From Gideon's perspective, the situation looked hopeless. 300 against 135,000 doesn't sound like good odds. But remember, it is 301 against 135,000. That One, El Gibbur, the Mighty God, makes all the difference in the world.

Do you sometimes feel like your situation is hopeless, that the odds against you are impossible? Are you filled with doubts, fears, and confusion? Do you struggle with habitual sin, negative thinking, addictions you can't seem to shake? Know this; Jesus the Mighty God is on your side. Pray to Him. He is both willing and able to apply His resurrection power to your life and your situation.

As Christians, we have been given the Mighty Name of Jesus to pray in. Please let us never neglect the gift of prayer we have received in Jesus.

Jesus is next referred to as the Everlasting Father. Again, let's revisit this concept. This little baby Jesus, lying in a manger, located in a stable, is God, The Eternal Father. I am amazed that people are confused about the deity of Jesus Christ. I have engaged Jehovah's witnesses before. They believe that Jesus is somehow lesser than God the Father. But this should clear up any misconception. Everybody agrees that this passage is a Messianic passage. It refers to Jesus the Messiah. He is called here Eternal Father. There is only One Person Who is ever referred to as the Eternal Father, and that is Jehovah God. Here the title is applied to Jesus. Therefore, Jesus and Jehovah are One and are equal. Still not convinced? Let's look at each name. Eternal has the sense of ever present; without beginning and without end. If you look at verse 7, it becomes evident that the kingdom Jesus initiates is complete. Nothing can be added to it. Those who put their faith in Jesus have peace, joy, and contentment for eternity. He is the only One Who can deliver justice and righteousness because He is the One Who is Just and Righteous. The grave could not hold Jesus. The grave can no longer hold you or me. We serve an eternal God and we are children of an eternal kingdom.

Why is all this important? Because we will face all kinds of suffering and tragedies in this life. We will face illness, loss of loved ones, we ourselves will suffer and die some day. From a strictly human perspective, we find it hard to understand why bad things happen to good people.

That question is unanswerable except that the Bible, and in particular, Jesus tells us that we will. It is part of the human experience.

But Jesus, in the manger, ... and later on the cross, ... later in the grave, ... and finally in heaven; brings perspective. We could ask, "Why did God Himself leave heaven, take on human flesh, experience the worst of all human suffering and death? Why would God the Father watch His One and Only Son suffer and die? Why would Jesus die when it was me that deserved death? Why?" The answer is love. God loved you and me so much, He was willing to embrace all this

pain and suffering so that we could share in His resurrection and life eternal in heaven with Him. Jesus is eternal. And so are we.

Add to Eternal, He is also called Father. We have been studying through the Gospel of Luke. God is Israel's Father, and now those who put their faith and trust in Jesus are God's children. We are invited to address God as Papa, Daddy, Father.

What are some of the things that our Eternal Father can help us with? If we are struggling with fear, with loss, with illness, with death, or even a sense of hopelessness; then run to the outstretched arms of our Eternal Father. He is the Only One Who can help us to make sense out of human pain and suffering, because He will give us an eternal perspective. Open the gift of love this Christmas, and let God parent you.

And finally, in this prophecy, Jesus is named the Prince of Peace. I think after 4000 plus years of human history, we can give up on the notion that governments will solve our problems and bring us peace. It is only where Jesus is recognized and served as Lord that there will be peace. The word Prince here has many shades of meaning. It is used in the context of royal government. It is used in a military context. And it has deep religious overtones. Jesus is the Prince. Jesus is the Only One Who can bring peace between God and man. He is the only One able to mediate. Why? Because Jesus was full God, and with the incarnation, became fully man. He is perfect. He is the perfect mediator of peace. I want to dispel this lie that has been going around for a couple of centuries now. Human beings are not naturally good. For the last couple of centuries, humanists have been going around saying that human beings are naturally good. I don't know what planet they have been living on, but as I pick up the newspaper every day, especially since 9-11, I'm hard pressed to see the natural goodness in human beings anywhere.

On the other hand, the Bible's assessment of human being is much more accurate. In our natural state, we are alienated from God and from one another.

It is only the peace that Jesus offers that can bring reconciliation between us and God, ... and reconciliation between one another. God's peace conquers the most horrible circumstances. In the Bible, peace does not mean the absence of conflict. If we know that we are at peace with God, then we can endure almost anything. Do you find yourself at peace this morning? That is what Christmas is all about. The angels said, "Glory to God in the highest ... and peace to His people on earth." There is no reason for anyone to go un-reconciled with God.

The gift of salvation is open to everyone. If you have not received this gift of reconciliation yet, please ask Jesus, the Prince of Peace into your heart. If you have already received the gift of salvation, share it with someone else. With the whole culture caught up in the Christmas season, be bold about sharing the real meaning of Christmas with everyone. Jesus wants us to share this gift.

Charles Dickens, the author of the popular Christmas story called, "A Christmas Carol" said this:

"I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round ... as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore ... though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

You see people's hearts are warmed and softened during the Christmas season. Be ready to share the gift of Jesus with them; for God has given to us Jesus; the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. And may God bless us all.

Let me just add a postscript. Do you remember that I wanted us to also connect this Advent Season with the Second Coming of Jesus? Jesus prophesied His own return. He said we should eagerly await His return. Christmas is a reminder that God kept the promise He made to Israel through the prophet Isaiah in sending Jesus. Jesus will keep His promise to His church that He will return just as He prophesied.