

To Us A Child is Born
Isaiah 8:19-9:7
Key Verse: 9:6

by Kevin Albright

"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." Isaiah 9:6

Merry Christmas! Last week we thought about Jesus, who is Immanuel--God with us. Today, we want to marvel and wonder more about Jesus. Jesus is the Great Light who dispels darkness. Jesus is our: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. May Jesus reign in all our hearts!

First, Jesus is the Great Light.

Isaiah the prophet lived in dark times. Two immediate neighbors to the north, Syria and Northern Israel, were threatening Judah. The brutal empire of Assyria was planning to conquer and pillage them all. The hearts of Ahaz king of Judah and of his people were shaken with fear, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind (7:2). The LORD warned Isaiah not to follow the way of this people. He said, "Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread." (8:12-13) The devil uses fear of people and of circumstances to enslave and paralyze people and keep them in darkness. Americans became more fearful after the terrorist attacks of Sep. 11, 2001. These days the unstable economy has made many people fearful. Out of fear, people seek answers in strange ways: like shaking a Magic 8 Ball, flipping a coin, asking a psychic, reading horoscopes or even fortune cookies. They buy lottery tickets with a vague hope for a miracle. By seeking answers apart from God, they don't find the way but plunge themselves into greater darkness. Darkness prevails where there is no peace, no direction, no fear of God. How can they come out of darkness?

Look at verses 19-20. "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn." God wants us to seek the answers in prayer through his word. If they do not speak according to God's word, they have no light of dawn. Rebellion against God leads to idolatry, then distress, darkness and fearful gloom (8:22).

In those dark times, however, Isaiah saw light. Look at chapter 9:1-2. Isaiah wrote, "Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress....The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." (9:1a, 2) Isaiah saw the light of God breaking through the gloom and dispelling the darkness. This light would enlarge the nation and increase their joy, like people rejoicing at harvest time or after a military victory.

Isaiah remembered another dark time in Israel's history when the light of God broke through to deliver them (Jdg 6-7). Look at verse 4. "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." The Midianites were powerful oppressors of Israel. At that time, the Israelites cried out to the Lord. God's word to Gideon was, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." Gideon replied, "...if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?...the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian." God's message to Gideon was, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?...I will be with you..." In the middle of the dark night, Gideon and 300 men blew trumpets, smashed jars and shouted. The light of their torches broke through the dark of night. And the Lord caused the Midianites to turn on each other. The Lord brought about a great victory for his people. Isaiah foresaw another great victory from God. Military clothing would be burned as fuel. There would be no more war. The happened under King Hezekiah's reign in battle against the Assyrians.

It happened in a more global and spiritual way some 700 years later. Matthew quoted these verses from Isaiah in his gospel. Just after Jesus was baptized and tempted by the devil, Jesus went and lived in Galilee, by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. This fulfilled what Isaiah wrote: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles--the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Mt 4:12-17)

The time of Jesus was dark. But Jesus dispelled the darkness. The light of the world is Jesus. Once Jesus and his disciples saw a man blind from birth. The disciples asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Then Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the pool of Siloam." So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. (Jn 9:1-7) This man was brought from the darkness of blindness to the light of new life by Jesus. Jesus' critics, however, remained in darkness. They accused Jesus of being a sinner because he did this healing on the Sabbath. The blind man testified boldly in defense of Jesus, "I was blind but now I see!"

We know the modern story of a missionary to Egypt. Growing up in Sudan, he grew to hate Muslims. But through Bible study, he heard Jesus' words on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Then he began to love and pray for Muslims. He began to love and pray for those who called him, "monkey." The light of Jesus brought him out of the darkness of hatred.

Once an adulterous woman was brought to Jesus (Jn 8:3-11). She was caught in the act of her dark lifestyle. The Jewish law required that she be stoned to death. When Jesus was interrogated to take a stand regarding this woman's fate, Jesus said, "Any of you who is without sin, throw the first stone." They all walked away, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left. Then Jesus asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." Jesus brings us out of the darkness of condemnation into the light of his forgiveness and new life. Without the light of Jesus we are walking in darkness. John 3:21 says, "But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." One young man was trapped in dark and shameful habits on the computer. Another young person was stuck in the darkness of a college dormitory room. But through the word of God and the grace of Jesus, the light shined upon them. Jesus is the Great Light, the true light that gives light to every person (Jn 1:9). Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

What else did Isaiah say about this time of light, peace, joy and victory? Look at verse 6a. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders." The light of God would drive out the darkness through the birth of a child. The peace of God would come through the giving of a son. Isaiah prophesied, "and the government will be on his shoulders." The government of God--the rule of heaven, would rest upon Jesus' shoulders. But he is not a selfish, power-hungry tyrant like so many in world history. Isaiah described his reign more fully in verse 7, "Of the increase 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." This government would grow forever. This peace would never end. This King would establish and uphold his kingdom with justice and righteousness from then until forever. How would this happen? Isaiah wrote, "The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this." Who is this long-awaited, wonderful King? What is his name? What is he like?

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled when God sent his Son to be born of the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. At Jesus' birth the glory of the Lord shone upon Bethlehem shepherds, and they were terrified. But the angel of the Lord said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (Lk 2:10-14)

Isaiah described the marvelous character of this coming king. What is he like?

Second, Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor.

We all need advice, counsel and wisdom. We need a good, reliable coach and cheerleader, who tells us not necessarily what we want to hear but what we need to hear. He guides us in the best way. Who could be such a counselor? What is it worth to have such a counselor? Many people will pay \$50 an hour to go and tell a professional all their problems, while mainly receiving more questions rather than helpful advice.

Jeremiah 29:11-12 says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you." The Bible calls the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, the Counselor (Jn 14:16). We need this Wonderful Counselor to guide and direct us. We all have decisions to make which determine the direction of our lives. Even when to get up in the morning and what we will do that day requires a decision. There are major life decisions to make: What shall I do with my life? Whom shall I marry? Where shall I go to school and what shall I study? What jobs shall I apply for or take? Shall I go out as a missionary or stay where I am to serve God? The most important life decision is, "Shall I accept Jesus as my Savior and Lord and commit my life to him? Shall I believe the Bible as the word of God?" We need the Wonderful Counselor's wisdom and help. When we pray and ask him for wisdom, he will give us wisdom. James 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

I want to relay a story about this Bible verse. When Mother Barry was a college sophomore she was overwhelmed by meaninglessness in her life. Based on James 1:5 she prayed, "God, if you are really there, give me wisdom according to this promise." A few days later someone invited her to study the Bible. She took it as an answer to her prayer. Through Romans study, she met Jesus, who shed his blood to forgive her sins. Through John's Gospel study, she met Jesus as the living water and bread of life.

Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor who knows his sheep by name. Jesus talked with the Samaritan woman. Even Jesus' disciples were surprised to see this. After talking with Jesus, she felt the living water welling up to eternal life in her soul. She was not embarrassed to tell her townspeople: "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, walked with two despairing disciples on the road to Emmaus. He taught them the Bible from Genesis to Malachi until the word of God was burning in their hearts like a fire. Jesus' wonderful counsel brought their dead hearts back to life and sent them running to tell others.

The Wonderful Counselor leads us according to truth in the best way, for he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. When we trust him with all our hearts, and lean not on our own understanding, the Wonderful Counselor makes our paths straight (Prov 3:5,6).

Third, Jesus is our Mighty God.

Jesus is the Mighty God. Through him all things were made. He sustains all things by his powerful word. By his mighty word, "Be clean," lepers were healed. By his word, "Ephphatha!" a deaf man could hear. By his word, "Talitha kum!" a dead girl came to life. By his word, "Quiet! Come out of him!" and "Go!" demons fled. By his word, "Quiet! Be still!" a stormy sea subsided. By his word, "Lazarus, come out!" and the dead man walked out of his tomb. Is anything too hard for Jesus?

There was a man who was known as a troublemaker who hurt many people. So he was chained. But he broke the chains and moved into a graveyard. People were afraid of him because he looked crazy and harmful. One day Jesus met him and asked, "What is your name?" "Legion," the man replied, "for we are many." Today, this man would either be ignored or put in a mental hospital or locked up in prison. But Jesus helped him. Jesus commanded the evil spirits in him: "Come out of him!" Jesus set him free from the torment of demons. From that time on, he became a blessing by telling many people what Jesus, the Mighty God had done for him.

Jesus is the Mighty God whose almighty word heals the sick, drives out demons and controls the sea. By his power, the blind could see, the lame could walk, the mute could speak. Nothing is impossible for Jesus, the Mighty God. He created all things. He created you and me. He is the Owner of our lives. The Mighty God stooped to save helpless sinners. Jesus is the one worthy of worship. When we worship Jesus, the Mighty God, his power works in and through us.

Fourth, Jesus is our Everlasting Father.

A good father loves, protects, trains and provides for his children. With a loving father, children grow well in humanity. But there are many children whose fathers are not present in their lives for one reason or another. Most juvenile delinquents are missing a positive father-figure in their lives. Some of them turn to gangs or to mischievous friends in an attempt to fill the void of a loving, caring father. However, even the best of human fathers have faults and cannot be there all the time for their children. Ultimately we all need an Everlasting Father. Jesus is an Everlasting Father to us. He will not abandon or leave us. Dr. William Altobar of the Philippines has three children of his own. He also has a father's heart for needy children; so he adopted three more children. Even a good human father like Dr. William cannot be there for his children forever. Only Jesus can be our Father Forever. Jesus

promised in John 14:18, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." He promised to be with us forever in Matthew 28:20, "Surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

A big part of my life story involves my father. My father passed away from a heart attack at the age of 47. I was 18 at the time. That event made me really question the meaning and direction of my life. I even considered the Catholic priesthood. But I decided to attend Northwestern University to study engineering. Through Bible study and what I can explain only as the work of the Holy Spirit I came to know the Lord as my Father in heaven. I came to believe the loving presence of Jesus and to have the confidence to call God, "Father." My human father was buried 27 years ago in April 1983. But I have an Everlasting Father, Jesus, who is with me always. He is with me to protect and provide and train and guide. He is with me in the Holy Spirit to convict me of sin, to remind me of his words of promise and command.

Jesus is our Everlasting Father, who cares about all his children. He gave his life to rescue his children from the power of the evil one. Jesus is full of love. His heart is always turned toward his children. He said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (Mt 19:14) He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is our Father who will love us forever. We are safe in his arms; no one can snatch us out of his hands.

Fifth, Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

The Jewish people have a great word for peace. It's Shalom. Shalom is not the absence of conflict. It is a state of contentment, safeness, satisfaction, completeness, health and blessing. Isaiah had a beautiful vision of the peace that God would bring in Isaiah 11. Even the lion and the lamb, natural enemies, would be friends: "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9)

Why don't we live in peace? This peace was lost due to sin. Sin broke the relationship between God and people. Sin also broke the relationship between people and people. World War II was called, "The war to end all wars." But it did not end all wars. Some Jews do not think that Jesus could be the Messiah because there is still war in the world. War continues between nations, between tribes and between individuals. There is interpersonal conflict between spouses, neighbors and colleagues. Then how is Jesus the Prince of Peace? How did he bring peace to people on earth?

Romans 5:1 says, "...since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul declares that sinners have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus brought this peace to us through his blood shed on the cross. This peace is given to those who accept the sacrifice of Jesus on their behalf and commit their lives to him. Paul used a word to describe this reunion of God to man and man to man. The word is "reconciliation" and it means to "get back together" (Ro 5:10-11). Through Jesus, the Prince of Peace we are brought back into a right relationship with God through the forgiveness of sin. Through Jesus, we have peace with God.

Everyone wants peace. We want peace in our world and peace in our hearts. People seek inner peace in so many ways. Some seek peace through a vacation. Many have tried to find peace through drugs or alcohol or immorality. Others try to forget their troubles through parties, or sports, or video or computer games, or music or sleeping in or some other hobby. These things may give an illusion of peace, but troubles soon come back. Dark clouds of depression and anxiety rob their joy. People have heavy hearts, weighed down by anxiety about grades, marriage, jobs, children, an uncertain future.

Where can we find peace? Isaiah wrote in 26:3, "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!" (NLT) God promises peace to those whose minds are stayed on him. The Prince of Peace gives us peace. Jesus, the Prince of Peace promised in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

There was an angry man who hated others because he thought he was right and all others were wrong. His goal was to destroy people who didn't agree with him. To his great surprise, one day he heard a voice calling his name, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He replied, "Who are you, Lord?" The voice replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." The enemy of Christ was not destroyed. He was forgiven and called. From that time on, Saul, who became better known as Paul, gave his whole heart and life to proclaim Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. Paul pleaded with people to repent and believe in Jesus and be saved. In the past he worked hard to destroy Christians.

But through Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and by his grace, he worked hard to save others by proclaiming in Jesus the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. Paul became a man of love and peace since he knew the Lord of Love and Prince of Peace.

May Jesus, the Great Light, our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace come and dwell in our hearts, throughout our nation and the world at this Christmas time and forever.