

Wonderful Counselor
Series: “Unto Us”
Pastor Jarrett Stephens

Intro – Isaiah 9:6

I love this time of year, and I’ve got to tell you I love preaching Christmas themed messages. The story of the birth of Jesus NEVER gets old! There would not be a crucifixion and resurrection or future consummation had there not first been an incarnation.

God in the flesh, IS the message of Christmas and over the next four weeks we are going to look at the prophecy Isaiah gave us of the coming Christ. Written in the 8th century, some 730 years before Jesus would ever be born, Isaiah spoke of a child that would be born...a son that would be given.

We’re calling this message series, *Unto Us: A Son is Given, A Savior is Here.*

Isaiah 9:1-7 – “But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. ³You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. ⁴For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶For 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. ⁷Of 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.”

This series is going to concentrate on (v. 6). Each week over the next four weeks, we are going to look at Jesus and how he fulfills the four-fold name and description given in this verse of being our “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.”

Today’s message is: **Wonderful Counselor**

Now, to understand the fullness of this prophecy and to really appreciate the names and description given of this child to come, we have to understand what all was taking place WHEN Isaiah makes this prophecy.

So, let’s look at a little history here...this will be fun! Isaiah was a prophet during the time of the divided kingdom. You had Israel to the North and Judah to the South. It was a time when the Assyrian Empire was on the rise.

Assyria was THE mega-power at the time and it was being led by a man by the name of Tiglath-pileser or “Pul” as he is also referred to in scripture...and he was on an aggressive expansion campaign for Assyria

In fact, I want to show you this map of the Assyrian Empire and what was taking place at this time (**SHOW MAP**).

Now, as you can see on this map, the yellow part represents the Assyrian Empire at the beginning of Tiglath-pileser’s reign. The green represents the Assyrian Empire at his death...this all happened in a period of about 18 years.

Now, when Isaiah makes this prophecy and this is VERY important, I want you to notice where the expansion comes from...it comes from the North.

So, for Assyria to continue taking land it has to take the Northern Kingdom (Israel first) as well as Syria (see Damascus in the far north of the inset pic.

Well, the leaders of Israel and Syria get together...they form a coalition to stop Assyria and they want Judah (where Isaiah is prophesying from) to join them.

Judah though is led by a king by the name of Ahaz. And let me just read for you a description of Ahaz.

2 Kings 16:2-4 – “Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God, as his father David had done, ³ but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. ⁴ And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree.”

So, Ahaz...he’s not a good guy. Israel and Syria are not happy that Judah is not joining in on their coalition to fight against big, bad Assyria, so they begin to wage war against Judah so they can take it over and then fight Assyria.

And so, do you know what Ahaz does? Instead of trusting in God as Isaiah told him to and tried to convince him to, Ahaz leads Judah to form an alliance with Assyria – the very nation that wants to rule over the entire region!

And it’s here that the prophet, Isaiah comes to Ahaz and essentially says, “Are you nuts?” Because you are not trusting in God and instead trusting in Assyria (and Ahaz TOTALLY sells out! Just read the rest of 2 Kings 16). Isaiah says judgment is coming, and the very nation you are aligning yourself with is going to overthrow you...it will be a dark day for Judah.

In fact, look at how the climax of this judgment is described in **Isaiah 8:22 – “And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.”**

THIS is the context of Isaiah 9. It was a time of:

- Darkness and despair...
- war and death...
- horrible leadership and power grabs...
- distress and gloom of anguish...
- it was a time of fear and terrible unknowns...

Sounds like a modern day parallel doesn't it? Well, it was in this context that THIS prophecy was spoken forth - that a child will be born and a son will be given...and he will change EVERYTHING!

Now, I'm not going to stay here long because we are going to hang out on the description of this child being a "wonderful counselor", but I want you to notice four – I'll call them "presents" that this child brings with him as we introduce this text.

What we pull out from the scripture here makes the arrival of Jesus that much more beautiful and while I will give a synopsis today of the four presents he brings, each week, I'll highlight one of those that correlates to his name.

First, I want you to notice this child brings with him: **Hope**

Isaiah 9:1 – “But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”

This is the first glimpse of hope Isaiah gives as he delivers his message of judgment to Ahaz and Judah. While there is coming a darkness and gloom, it won't be that way forever! “In the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”

Remember what I told you the North represented? Throughout Israel's history, this is always where trouble came from!

It always came from the North. Zebulun and Naphtali were the furthest north tribes in the nation of Israel. It represented the backwoods...it was far away from Jerusalem and the life of the city.

It was from this area, Isaiah says, that hope would come. Interesting, isn't it? Hope coming from the most unlikely of places – Bethlehem...and then the Galilee of the Gentiles.

Matthew's gospel states that as Jesus began his earthly ministry **Matt. 4:14-15 – “And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ¹⁵“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles...”**

Isaiah prophesying 730 years before Jesus would ever be born was prophesying of a HOPE that he would bring with him. Are you in need of hope today?

I'll return to this theme of hope toward the end of our time together. This is what Christmas is about! Jesus brings with him hope.

Secondly, he brings with him: **Light**

Isaiah 9:2 – “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.”

Have you ever been in a place where you could feel darkness? I was reading an article this week about some of the hostages that have been released from Hamas. Hamas kept some of them in complete darkness.

Illus. Article on Adina Moshe (SHOW PIC) 72 years of age – “Adina Moshe was dragged from her safe room at home in Israel, taken to Gaza and forced into tunnels five stories underground, her nephew Eyal Nouri said. “They took her inside the tunnels ... she walked, bare feet in the mud of the tunnels...It was very hard to breathe.”...Moshe was held in an underground room where the lights were switched on for only two hours a day. The darkness was literal and also figurative, Nouri said. Deprived of any information, their other senses and imaginations became keener.”

Can you imagine the darkness? As literal as it was dark in those tunnels, it was as dark spiritual for the people living in the days of the birth of Christ. Not a word from a prophet for over 400 years, and then out of seemingly nowhere, light appears!

I'm going to speak next week of how our Mighty God brings light! Christmas and celebrating with lights go hand in hand!

Illus. Twins last night – looking at lights

The apostle John loved this theme of light...for him light meant life!

John 1:4-5, 9 – “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.”

Unto us...a son is given, a savior is here. He brings with him hope. He brings with him light. Thirdly, he brings with him: **Joy**

Isaiah 9:3 – “You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil.”

The coming of this child will turn gloom to joy. And this is exactly what Jesus does. In the third week of this series, we'll camp out on this theme of joy and how it correlates to the name "Everlasting Father".

- You can't talk about Christmas though without talking about joy. Just think of all the songs we sing with "joy" as its theme! The main one being "Joy to the world, the Lord has come!"
- You can't talk about Christmas without watching it through a child's eyes as they explode with joy!

Christmas is synonymous with joy...this is what Jesus brings with him! Jesus brings hope. He brings light. He brings joy.

And finally, he brings with him: **Peace**

This will be our message at our Christmas Eve service. The Prince of Peace brings with him, peace. One day, there will be no more war. There will be no more conflict. Jesus will rule and reign in complete peace.

Isaiah speaks of this child having a government...he will be a ruler.

Isaiah 9:7 – "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."

Notice this government will be perpetual...it will be everlasting...and it will be consummated upon his return.

Illus. 3D glasses at Christmas Spectacular – See, this is what Isaiah is doing here.

He puts on some glasses and not only points to what will take place 700 years from the time of his writing – a child will be born, a son given – Isaiah sees the first coming of Jesus. But his prophetic glasses allow him to see a time even further out where this child that is born will reign over a world-wide government. This speaks of what will take place at his second coming! It's beautiful isn't it? Jesus came the first time in humility:

- He was born in Bethlehem – there wasn't even an inn to take him in. Born in a cave...a barn if you will!
- He grew up on the backside of nowhere! Nazareth – could anything good come from Nazareth, his disciple, Nathaniel would ask? He ministered in the countryside to the hillbillies of the Galilee.

- He died a cursed death – on a cross...was placed in a borrowed tomb!

Everything about his first coming was humble...he came as a suffering servant! But, what Isaiah sees here?! It's NOT suffering servant...it is a ruling and reigning sovereign!

And when he comes, and initiates his government, it will be a peace through power because NONE are more powerful than the resurrected Jesus.

THIS text is beautiful. And this Jesus who brings with him hope, light, joy and peace is called in (v. 6) "Wonderful Counselor".

The word "wonder" is a word that means "astonishing"...or marvel.

In our vernacular today, we are familiar with Marvel Comics. These are larger than life...in most cases supernatural people with supernatural powers.

Well, Isaiah sees this child as the first Marvel. One commentary pointed out "To designate the Child with this word is to make the clearest attestation of His deity."

And I think the placement of this word is significant...it's the first name given on the list of names!

This child that is born...this son that is given...this Savior that is here is first and foremost Deity. Notice, the incarnation – a "child is born" – that's humanity. Notice his human is divine – "a son is given" – given from above.

Jesus is the God-man. 100% God and 100% man. It is a wonder...we should marvel at this marvelous baby that was born.

There is a song we sing this time of the year called "I Wonder as I Wander" – it's all about the wonder of Christ birth. There is a lesser-known hymn called "Wonder of Wonders". Just listen to the words:

**The wonder of wonders as she looked on his face
That this little boy spoke the worlds in their place
The stars and the moon shining brightly on them
The earth and the sun were created by him**

**The wonder of wonders as she heard his small cry
That this voice had thundered on Mount Sinai
The hand that she held so tenderly
Had made a dry path thru the mighty Red Sea**

**The wonder of wonders as she looked down and smiled
That He was her Maker as well as her child**

**He created the womb that had given Him birth
He was God incarnate come down to the earth**

**The wonder of wonders oh how could it be
That God became flesh and was given for me
The Almighty came down and walked among men
The wonder of wonders He died for my sin**

This baby...Christmas...it really is something to marvel at! The wonder of it all! It should provoke thought and worship...and thoughtful worship.

Jesus is a supernatural...extraordinary...WONDERFUL counselor - this is his name! This baby born would be the wisest person to ever live.

Isaiah 11:2 (speaking of the Messiah to come – he would be a righteous branch from the line of David...referred to as a “shoot from the stump of Jesse” on him)– **“And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”**

We know Jesus is wisdom personified. One of the reasons I read a proverb of the day every day is to gain wisdom. But if I want to see wisdom in action, all I have to do is read the life of Jesus. To follow wisdom is to follow Jesus.

This is why the scripture says in **Prov. 1:33** – **“but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.”**

“me” is wisdom...it’s Jesus! The scripture says in **Prov. 8:36b**– **“...all who hate me, love death.”** “me” is wisdom...it’s Jesus.

If you have a problem...an issue...a conflict...and you need wisdom, advice, counsel, a plan – go to your Wonderful Counselor!

As we saw in the book of James, he is waiting to give you wisdom from above! **James 1:5** – **“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”**

The ways of this world...the counsel of this world is foolish!
In Isaiah’s time, these kings did not walk in the ways of their father, David.

Instead they went their own way...they didn’t listen to the voice of the prophets God sent to them. So, God sent his Son. And he sent him as a Wonderful Counselor - one who would always direct us in the way we should go. This is why we should give ourselves to his word because his word provides counsel for life.

Illus. Alice Marlow funeral– Mr. Bobby – “If you ever have questions about life, just go to the Bible.”

Illus. College decision (bulls-eye)

Just think about the gift of Jesus being a “Wonderful Counselor” as it relates to the word hope. I told you each week, I’m going to correlate what this child brings with him with his name that is given.

Next week: Mighty God brings light. The next week: Everlasting Father brings joy. Christmas Eve: The Prince of Peace brings peace. This week: The Wonderful Counselor brings hope.

Illus. With a family this week – in need of hope? Is your marriage in need of hope? A wayward child coming back home and back to the faith? Someone you love, sick or ill or even dying?

Illus. Day of Comfort – Monday, Dec. 4, 1:00-7:00 in Chapel

Illus. Christmas Blues - Have you ever heard of the Christmas Blues? It’s not just a song by Dean Martin...it’s a real thing! Just Google it!

This is from an article by a professional counselor. She defines and describes the Christmas Blues in this way:

“The stress of the holidays triggers sadness and depression for many people. This time of year is especially difficult because there’s an expectation of feeling merry and generous. People compare their emotions to what they assume others are experiencing or what they’re supposed to feel. Then they think that they alone fall short. They judge themselves and feel like an outsider. There’re a host of things that add to stress and difficult emotions during the holidays.”

Everything from finances to loneliness from grief to estrangement in relationships...these things can cause us to spin into depression and darkness. And what people need more than anything is hope!

It’s been said: **“Man can live about forty days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air, but only for a one second without hope.”**

The people in Isaiah’s day...there was very little hope. Assyria was gaining ground, and it was just a matter of time before they were overtaken, and many would be deported. Their homeland would be subjected to being infiltrated with pagan people.

In the days before Jesus, Roman occupation held the people in check. They were oppressed...it was as Isaiah said, “days of distress and darkness...gloom of anguish...thick darkness.”

This may describe some of you right now. It’s dark days...FULL of distress and gloom. FULL of anguish – we see this don’t we?

- We have a mental health crisis that is going on all around us?

- We have a war in the Middle East, a war in the Ukraine.
- Like the divided kingdom, we have power grabs in our governments and among our national leaders no one it seems listening to the voice of God.

What are we to do? Looking around, it would be EASY to throw in the towel and give up. How are we to live in this time and continue to be salt and light in a world that despises us?

Thankfully, God didn't leave us to ourselves. He gave us Jesus – our Wonderful Counselor. When we trust him, he gives us his Holy Spirit – this is God in us – he too goes by the name Counselor.

And the reality is, no matter how hopeless it may appear to be – the fact that the Wonderful Counselor was born, given to us, and by faith lives in us...this allows us to NEVER lose hope.

In fact, having Jesus as our “Wonderful Counselor” should make us the most hopeful people on the planet.

Illus. Handel's Messiah – Everyone knows the work of the German composer, Handel. His most famous oratorio was written in 1741 and while there is a lot surrounding the story behind why it was written and when it was written, what's amazing is that he wrote it in just 24 days.

It was actually meant to be played at Easter – this is where we get the Hallelujah chorus from! But, it has become a Christmas favorite mainly because it tells the story (straight from scripture by the way – it's ALL scripture pulled from 14 different books of the Bible 43 from the Old Testament and 30 from the New Testament) sharing of the prophecies of Christ, his birth, his death, his resurrection – it's beautiful and probably the most loved orchestral work in history.

What we don't realize is that while Handel wrote the music, the text or libretto as it is called was written by Charles Jennens. They collaborated on various projects and here's what you need to know about Jennens.

He was a devout Christian. And in the church of England in that day there was a philosophy being embraced called Deism. It's this idea that like a clock, God sets the world in motion and then steps back and lets it run its course.

In other words, he's not involved in the day-to-day affairs of life, certainly not a personal God, interested in your personal life!

Jennens knew this type of theology was wrong and he also knew that it struck at the heart of the scripture.

So, in an effort to combat this, he put his mind and talent of writing librettos to work. He figured if the people aren't paying attention to the preacher's (imagine that!) OR if the preachers weren't

teaching truth, he'd find a way to communicate this truth in a beautiful and compelling way – i.e. through the arts!

He wanted people to hear scripture and the prophecies of Christ because he knew this would give people hope!

So, he wrote this, and it's recorded that he gave it to Handel to put to music writing to a friend: **“I hope he will lay out his whole genius and skill upon it, that the composition may excel all his former compositions, as the subject excels every other subject. The subject is Messiah.”**

As noted, Handel who was in a bit of a career crisis himself locked himself in a room and after 24 days we have what has become known as “The Messiah”.

Handel speaking of his time in writing this said: **“I think that I did see all heaven before me and the great God Himself!”**

You will hear this song everywhere this Christmas...in movies...in malls...on the radio. Let me give you a sampling of it and whenever you hear it, let it be a reminder to you of what we're talking about in this series.

UNTO US. A Son is Given. A Savior is here. His name will be called:

- “Wonderful Counselor who brings with him HOPE.
- “Mighty God” who brings with him light.
- “Everlasting Father” who brings with him joy.
- And “Prince of Peace” who brings with him, peace.

Let's just listen to just 90 second of it, as we bring this message to a close.

PLAY MESSIAH (1:31) Beautiful. Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.