

Isaiah 9:1-7 (1984 NIV)
Born to Bring Light

1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

3 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.

4 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.

5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

6 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.

7 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.

Introduction

The celebration of the dumpling and dragon boat festival as a tradition is to commemorate the Chinese patriot Qu Yuan. Ancient Chinese folklore tells of Qu Yuan as a wise and patriotic Chinese government official who lived during the period of the Warring States (475–246 BC). He repeatedly warned his king of an impending threat that would destroy the country, but the king ignored him. Eventually, Qu Yuan was exiled. When he learned of the fall of his beloved country to the foe he had warned about, he became so depressed that he ended his own life.

Qu Yuan's life resembles in some ways that of the prophet Jeremiah. He also served kings who scorned his warnings, leading to his country being ravaged. However, while Qu Yuan gave in to his despair and killed himself, Jeremiah found hope in God.

Jeremiah knew that only God could offer true hope. Even after the people lost their land, God said to him that "there is hope for your future ... Your children will return to their own land" (Jer 31:17). Indeed, although Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC and her people exiled, it was later rebuilt by the people who returned from exile (Neh 6:15).

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At some point, we all find ourselves in situations that can cause us to despair—a bad medical report, a sudden job loss, a failed exam, or a broken family. But when life knocks us down, we can still look up ... for God is on the throne! He holds our days in His hands, and He holds us close to His heart.

John Wesley once said it very well, “The world hopes for the best, but the Lord offers the best hope.”

Our text today is taken NOT from the Book of Jeremiah, but from the earlier Book of Isaiah. Today we want to study what God has for us to know, learn, and live out in Isa 9:1-7. This is a piece of very good news given to God’s people at a time when they were going through some very difficult times—they were oppressed by both their wicked kings and evil enemies.

It’s a prophecy through Isaiah to bring comfort and hope to the depressed and discouraged people. It is about the coming of a king, the birth of a child who would bring light into their dark world of oppression. And this Good News is actually a messianic prophecy—it is not merely about a good king or a child to come, but about the coming of the promised Messiah to bring the light of God’s salvation to a world darkened by sin. It is a prophecy that points to the birth of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, there is one message we must not neglect telling the world. And that message is: “Jesus is born to bring the light of God’s salvation into our world darkened by sin.”

As we look at Isa 9:1-7 today, we want to especially examine v. 6—to discover its significance and relevance in the context of Isaiah’s day and for us today?

I. Historical Context

Isaiah is quoted 60+ times in the New Testament. But what makes this book so significant for Christians is the way in which it bears witness to Jesus Christ.

Isaiah was writing during a very turbulent time in the history of the divided kingdom—i.e. Israel and Judah—when God’s people were being threatened by the expanding Assyrian empire. During Isaiah’s early time as a prophet, Ahaz was king of Judah. Ahaz was considered by many to be a wicked king. Ahaz’s epitaph in 2 Kings 16:3 reads: “He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel ... following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.” It was Ahaz who agreed to an “unholy alliance” with the Assyrians which brought temporary relief to the Southern Kingdom of Judah from Assyrian threat.

In 722 B.C. Assyria invaded the Northern Kingdom of Israel and eventually captured the capital city of Samaria. Many people were deported to Assyria and Israel became a vassal state.

The deportation of the Northern tribes produced a crisis of faith in which God's people were confronted with the possibility that God might have abandoned them. During this crisis, many people doubted God's goodness and power to save them.

The words of Isaiah in Isa 9:1-7 are a confession of faith in God and in the future of God's people. According to the prophet, God would fulfil His promise to David and raise a king who would bring redemption to God's people. This king would bring salvation to a hopeless people and liberate them from their enemies. God's people would then forever live in peace under the leadership of this new king.

- Isa 9:2 – “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”
- Isa 9:6 – “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.”

Some have suggested that Isaiah's prophecy merely predicted the birth of another king; a good king to replace the evil Ahaz. But as we look at Isaiah's prophecy together with other parts of the NT, we can conclude that this is clearly a messianic prophecy—predicting the coming of the King of kings, which was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem some 700 years later.

- Isaiah 7:14 says - “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”
- And Matthew cited this verse in his Gospel in Matt 1:22-23 – “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means *God with us*).’”

Every messianic prophecy carries a two-fold fulfilment—a near/partial fulfilment and a further/full fulfilment that relates to Jesus as the Promised Messiah. The near fulfilment of Isa 9:6-7 has reference to the enthronement of a new king to be born. Some commentators suggest that this is a likely reference to Hezekiah. He was a son of the evil king Ahaz and succeeded his father as the 12th king of Judah. But unlike his father, Hezekiah was considered a righteous king (2 Kings 18:3).

However, Hezekiah in his later years as king of Judah began to ally himself with the Babylonians, an emerging power who eventually defeated the might of Assyria.

Unfortunately, he later fell out of favour with the Babylonians who invaded and captured Jerusalem, the capital city of the Southern Kingdom of Judah (ca

605 B.C.). Some from Judah were carried to Babylon. Since Babylon had then defeated Assyria, those exiles from the Northern Kingdom were now joined by those from the Southern Kingdom under the same Babylonian captivity.

In the NT, Matthew cited Isaiah 9:1-2 in his Gospel in Matt 4:14-16. His purpose was to point to Jesus as the fulfilment of what Isaiah had prophesied when the Lord began His public ministry in Galilee which actually had a large Gentile population.

II. Names of the Messiah in Verse 6

Many years ago, I knew a young couple (both in age and Christian faith) who had their first baby girl. I congratulated them and asked what name they had given the baby.

The man said proudly, “We have chosen a very nice-sounding, very unique; and most importantly, a very biblical name.”

I asked curiously, “That’s great. So, what’s the name?”

The man answered, “Jezebel!”

Surprised, I asked again, “Oh ... but do you know who’s Jezebel in the Bible?”

The couple looked at me ignorantly. So, I explained to them—trying to hide my amusement as best as I could—“In 1 Kings, Jezebel was the pagan queen of the evil King Ahab. She led the king into idolatry, and tried to kill Elijah, the faithful prophet of God.”

The couple was stunned, and the man quickly responded, “Thank you for telling us that. We will need to change the name.”

They went to the Registry of Births to do that as they had already registered the baby’s name. I think they had to pay a penalty fee for making that change.

A good name is important because it is supposed to reflect not only the identity, but also the characteristics of the person bearing that name.

In Isa 9:6-7, the child to be born and who would one day be king bears four important names which I want us now to look at in turn—Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace—and how each of these applies to Jesus Christ.

1. Wonderful Counsellor

Some among us are trained in counselling. What are the traits of a wise and good counsellor? Isaiah described the Messiah as not just a wise and good

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counsellor, but the Wonderful Counsellor. As we look at the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in the NT, He is portrayed as the Wonderful Counsellor in the following ways:

- i. Jesus does not judge in a condemning manner. When you're hurting or struggling, the last thing you want is to feel judged and condemned. Yet, it's so easy for people with knowledge to judge others. Jesus, the Wonderful Counsellor, would point out a person's sin not with condemnation, but with compassion—e.g. His encounter with the adulterous woman. He says to her, "Look, your accusers are gone. I don't condemn you. You're free to go now and to leave behind your life of sin" (John 8:10-11, paraphrased).
- ii. Jesus teaches truth that sets people free. He has lots of truth to share. And He shares not in an overbearing manner, but through active listening, empathy, and gentle suggestions. He is the Wonderful Counsellor who works to set us free from our problems and hurts with His truth. But the way for us to be so delivered by His truth is for us to follow Him and hold on to His teaching (John 8:31-32).
- iii. Jesus is intensely interested in people's lives. Jesus is anything but superficial in His conversations with people. He delves deep into the heart and soul of people. He cares for those who are tired from carrying heavy burdens. Jesus grants deep soul rest that helps people learn to walk freely in life. To the worried and wearied, Jesus says: "Come to me ... and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:28-30).
- iv. Jesus sees possibilities in people. He says, "With God all things are possible!" (Matt 19:26). Jesus sees that Simon the deserter can become Peter the Rock. When Peter has denied Jesus and is greatly disappointed with his own self, Jesus seeks him out. He shows Peter that He still loves and believes in him. And even though Peter has failed so badly, he still has so much potential in him. Jesus restores Peter and re-instates him to ministry (John 21:15-19).

After Jesus physically left the earth, the Holy Spirit would carry on His ministry. He named the Spirit as "Paracletos", meaning the Counsellor, Comforter, Helper, Advocate, or Strengthener. The Spirit of Jesus comes to live inside all who believe and receive Jesus into their lives. The Spirit reminds of Jesus' person and words, and gently guides and directs people in their life journeys (John 14:16-17, 26; 16:13).

These are some ways to view Jesus as the Wonderful Counsellor. As Christmas approaches, let's prepare to tell people that Jesus wants to be the Wonderful Counsellor in their lives.

2. Mighty God

In the NT, the Apostle Paul declares “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24), and writes that one day “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil 2:10). These emphasize to us the sovereign rule of Jesus Christ over all peoples one day.

The title “Mighty God” emphasizes the power that the coming king has in defending and delivering His people. Jesus Christ as the Messiah King is that Mighty God. He has the power to forgive sins. And more than this, He has the power to keep people from sinning and to lead them to a victorious life (Romans 16:20).

Very often when a Christian refers to his/her “enemies”, he/she is speaking about the sin in the flesh, and the temptations and lusts that arise from there. These are enemies because they tempt us to act contrary to the will of God. These can also be expressions of the spirit of our times that have caused so much violence, hurt, and disorder in our world today. What are some of these expressions?

- Impatience
- Selfishness
- Hunger for power
- Pride
- Retaliation

Instead of these, the world needs more expressions of patience, self-giving, gentleness, humility, and forgiveness. All these things are within Jesus’ power to give and He does not hesitate to give to those who sincerely and fervently ask ... because these are things in accordance to His will (1 John 5:14-15). If you are praying for or giving some gifts this Christmas, perhaps you may want to consider asking or giving some godly measures of patience, self-giving, gentleness, humility, and forgiveness.

The late American civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr preached one of his most moving sermons on the title “Loving Your Enemies”. He was imprisoned at the time for daring to suggest that American Negroes should have the same civil rights as white Americans. During his lifetime he had received death threat after death threat, he had been maliciously accused of being a communist, his house had been bombed, and he was jailed over 20 times. Yet in this sermon he said, “... hate multiplies hate ... in a descending spiral of violence ... love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend for it has redemptive power.”

If you think that the power to love and forgive in Martin Luther King Jr is great, it is great only because it originates with and from Jesus Himself. Indeed, the power of His love and forgiveness is so great that there is no sinner who is too wretched for Him to save, nor any sin that is too deep for Him to forgive.

(<http://storiesforpreaching.com/category/sermonillustrations/love-for-enemies>)

This is how Jesus can be the Mighty God in our lives. As Christmas approaches, let's prepare to tell people that Jesus wants to be the Mighty God in their lives.

3. Everlasting Father

This title refers to the king as the one who would guide his people with unflinching fatherly love in the same way God loves and cares for His people in Jesus Christ. What does this mean to you and me today? Well, there are some important truths for us to hold onto.

- i. Jesus, like God the Father, is the Author and Source of Eternal Life. 1John 5:11-12 – “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Without Jesus as the Author and Source of Eternal Life, all of us are separated from God because of our sins. Simply put, we are all spiritually dead.

- ii. Jesus, like God the Father, sustains all of life. Col 1:17 says, “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Can you imagine what happens if Jesus Christ would relinquish His sustaining power over the laws of the universe? If He would suspend the law of gravity, we would all perish in unimaginable ways.

How does the universe stay in such marvellously delicate order and balance? Things do not happen in our universe by accident in the beginning, at this time, and in the end ... because Jesus Christ is sustaining the universe, keeping it in order and balance yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Jesus who is before all things and who sustains the universe is also the one who sustains you and me. It is He who has promised to meet our needs as we seek His Kingdom and righteousness as our priority (Matt 6:33). He is able to keep us and complete what He has started in us— i.e. to chip away the old self in us and carve His image in each one of us (Phil 1:6).

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. He will never leave us; never stop loving us; never stop caring for us, like a loving father does to his children (Rom 8:35-39). He is the source of all grace and mercy; forbearance and forgiveness. Santa Claus has none of these in his bag of goodies; but Jesus has them all for us, flowing abundantly out of His heart of love which is new every morning.

- iii. Jesus, like God the Father, is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (Isa. 44:6; Rev. 22:13). He is directing the world towards its determined end, and He will return to reign as its rightful King. The one whose birth we celebrate at Christmas is the Author and Finisher of this world and our faith.

As Christmas approaches, let's prepare to tell people that in a world where so many things seem so short-lived, short-term, uncertain, and fast-changing, there is an unchanging hope—i.e. the unending and unfailing care, love, protection, and provision of the Everlasting Father in heaven who came to us in human flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ.

4. Prince of Peace

Remember that this was spoken to a people who were under oppression, both from enemy nations and also from the ungodliness of their own kings.

That is why at the end of Isaiah 8 (v. 22), God's people at that time could "see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom." But to them is the promise that they will see a great light; that their hardship will end because "unto us a child is born" and his name will be Prince of Peace!

Jesus is the Prince of Peace; the Peacemaker Par Excellence because through His sacrifice on the cross, we are made right with God and experience peace with God.

But sadly for many people in our world today, peace seems to be such an elusive thing. They chase after it, expecting to find it in relationships, marriage, children, hobbies, careers, possessions, etc. But it is only in and through Jesus that we discover true peace as we receive God's love, acceptance and forgiveness. This is why Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He proclaimed 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."

Isaiah 9:6 points prophetically to Jesus as the Prince of Peace. But how can His peace be real when the world today seems so unsettling economically, politically, militarily, socially, and environmentally? To answer this, we need to understand the word "peace" as the Bible has intended it to be.

- i. Peace with God. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom (Matt 27:50-51). This signified that the separation between God and humanity was now over. Peace between the holy God and sinful humanity is made possible in Jesus Christ.
- ii. Peace within oneself and with others. We are commanded to "live in peace" with others, as far as it depends on us (Rom 12:18; 2 Cor

13:11; Heb 12:14). To live in peace with others means we interact and relate with those around us with our own wholeness of being. God's desire is that we who know Him learn to live in peace within ourselves. Then we can radiate that peace to others, bringing calmness and wisdom to difficult situations (Matt 5:14; Phil 2:14–15). And we can only work at peace within oneself and with others when we are first at peace with God in Jesus Christ.

- iii. Peace in spite of circumstances. The Hebrew word for peace is “shalom”. It means more than just peace. It means completeness, wholeness, health, and harmony. It means to bind together the different fragments of life into a meaningful whole. Peace is not about the absence of trouble from our lives, but the reassurance that no matter what we face in life Jesus is with us, and that nothing can separate us from His love (Rom 8:38-39). Jesus said in John 16:33 – “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

So, true peace is anchored in the love of Jesus Christ for us. It is not the absence of trouble; it is the presence of the Lord with us. This inner peace comes from knowing that circumstances are only temporary but the Lord Jesus is always in sovereign control, even over the storms of nature (Mark 4:35-41). Such peace comes from exercising faith in the character of the Lord and His Word.

- iv. Peace as a trait of the Holy Spirit. One trait of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in and through us is peace (Gal 5:22). Such a trait points others to Jesus. We are to be peacemakers like Jesus. Such a peacemaker puts himself last and God's Kingdom first, just like Jesus. That's how we can impact this ME-FIRST world with a GOD-FIRST life.

As Christmas approaches, let's prepare to tell people that in Jesus Christ we can have peace in the midst of challenges because in Him we can have a relationship that reassures us that we are never alone ... for He is always with us. This helps us keep things in godly perspective. We can accept difficult situations in a restive and uncertain world by reminding ourselves that our eternal future is not in this imperfect world, but with the Perfect Lord Himself (Phil 3:20). Ultimately, all our earthly gains and losses will be inconsequential.

III. Our Reflection & Action

Isaiah prophesies in Isa 9:2 – “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”

Jesus says this of Himself 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.”

With the coming of Jesus, Paul says in Eph 5:8 – “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”

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Jesus is the “great light” who has dawned to dispel the “deep darkness”. Whatever problems that might be casting deep darkness in the hearts and minds of people, the divine light that Jesus brings will enlighten every person, taking him/her out of darkness into light.

Isaiah’s prophecy of the coming king was a message of hope for God’s people then in a time of great distress. But it is also a message for all of us today to rejoice in because it is “for to us a child is born; to us a son is given”.

This is a time of preparation as we get ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus. In the busyness that accompanies the run up to Christmas, allow me to give four simple suggestions for reflection and action:

1. Rejoice that you can know Jesus personally as your Lord and Saviour.
2. Think about how you can commit afresh in giving more room for Jesus in your life.
3. What does it mean to you in daily life that Jesus is your Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace?
4. Lost people need Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and every sinner is loved by Him. Pray and prepare yourself this Christmas to reach out to some people in Jesus’ love so that they can be blessed with the same gift of salvation that you have already received.

Conclusion

The brightest news we can rejoice in and tell others as we prepare to celebrate Christmas is this: “Jesus has come to bring light to the world so that in Him people can know and experience the wisdom, power, love, and peace of God.”

Let’s go and proclaim this coming Christmas that Jesus Christ is the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. And may the Lord help us as we do this ... with conviction and with celebration. Amen!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus,

You are our Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Let us know and experience you as such in our lives, especially this Christmas season. Do this in us so that we are able to live, love, and share your peace with those around us, despite the uncertainties and disorder happening in our world today. Give us boldness and confidence to share the Good News of your birth so that others can hear, know, believe, and receive God’s gift of love, grace, forgiveness, and eternal life to them in

and through you. You are born to bring the light of God's salvation to us. Let your peace that surpasses all understanding be with us all so that we can in turn be your peacemakers here on earth—peace with God, peace within oneself, and peace with others.

We pray and ask all this in your most precious name. Amen!