



The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Isaiah 9:6

December 11, 2011
English Standard Version

“God’s Names”

Isaiah 9:6

“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.”

Heavenly Father, thank You for making us Your people. We thank You for Your word. We thank You for its richness. We thank You for its truth. We thank You for how it points to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and we pray tonight that You would open our eyes to behold wonderful things in Your word and above all to behold the Wonderful Counselor Himself. Focus us on Your Word and on Your Son. We desperately need Him this morning. Help us to see Jesus today, in His holy and precious name, we pray, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *What’s in a Name?*¹

One of the many important decisions confronting new parents is, “What name shall we give to our baby?” Most new parents spend hours debating this question. We all realize that names matter. Shall the new baby be named after his father, his uncle, a favorite friend? Should she be given a name that happens to be popular at the moment? Or one that simply sounds

1 The Introduction is adapted from the sermon, “*What Child is This?*” by Rev. Ron Pritchard, Calvary Memorial Church, Oak Park, IL 12/22/96 www.keepbelieving.com. All the British stuff comes from Wikipedia.

good? And then you have to make sure that the initials don't spell something embarrassing.

Names are important because once you pick out a name the child will be stuck with it for a long, long time! Babies have no voice in the selection of their names. They have to live with them — to live them up or live them down.

Names are important because you tend to become what your name represents. I've done a few weddings this year, and when it comes to wedding vows, I like to use the first and middle names to make it more personal. And I remember seeing the British royal wedding this past summer when Prince William married Catherine Middleton. And when it came time for Prince William to take his vows, it was "I, William Arthur Philip Louis, take you Catherine Elizabeth, to be my wedded wife." Of course his full name and titles read as follows — His Royal Highness Prince William Arthur Philip Louis, Duke of Cambridge, Earl of Strathearn, Baron Carrickfergus, Royal Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter. If you think that's a heavy load to lay on a lad, remember he's royalty and he needs a long name. Not to mention that he's a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, a Flight Lieutenant in the Royal Air Force, and a Captain in The Blues and Royals Regiment.

Things could always be worse. The full name of William's father, Prince Charles, is Charles Philip Arthur George of the House of Windsor. His titles are: His Royal Highness The Prince Charles Philip Arthur George, Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester, Duke of Cornwall, Duke of Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron of Renfrew, Lord of the Isles, Prince and Great Steward of Scotland, Royal Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, Royal Knight Companion of the Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the Thistle, Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath [And the rest of the house, I'm sure], Member of the Order of Merit, Knight of the Order of Australia, Companion of the Queen's Service Order, Member of Her Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, and Personal Aide-de-Camp to Her Majesty the Queen. His military ranks are General of the British Army, Admiral of the Royal Navy, and Air Chief Marshal of the Royal Air Force.

What does all this have to do with Isaiah 9? Well, in this verse, we learn that giving multiple names to royalty didn't begin with the British Empire ... so it is with Jesus. Even before His birth, He was a child with many names. The prophet Isaiah, writing 700 years before He was born, prophesied that the Messiah would have four names, "*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.*"

This verse reveals four names for Jesus. Each one unlocks an aspect of His character. They teach who He is and how He can help us today. One of our beloved Christmas carols is cast in a form a plaintive question, "*What child is this, who laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?*" If this morning you have that question in your mind, listen to Isaiah's divinely-inspired answer. These four names speak to us about wisdom, power, love, and blessing.

And so we're going to start with the first one ...

WONDERFUL COUNSELOR: THE NAME OF WISDOM²

2 The Exposition of the text has adapted material from the Book, *Preaching the Word-Isaiah: God Saves Sinners* by Dr. Ray Ortlund, Jr. **And the Sermons**, "A Light for Those in Darkness," 12/9/07 and "A Child is Born," 12/7/03, both by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan; "From Light to Darkness," by Dr. Derek Thomas, 12/11/05, all of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, www.fpcjackson.org; "What Child is This?" by Rev. Ron Pritchard, Calvary Memorial Church, Oak Park, IL 12/22/96 www.keepbelieving.com.

Literally this title means “a wonder of a counselor.” It speaks of the wisdom of His plan. The word “**wonderful**” means “astonishing” or “extraordinary.” Now, the word “**wonderful**” in Hebrew is about as close as you can get to ascribing deity because He’s one who elicits **wonder**, He’s one who elicits **awe**.

And He elicits that wonder and awe through the way that He counsels. He understands your condition, He really does. He understands what your needs are this morning. He understands the deepest recesses of that psyche of yours and mine. There’s no situation, there’s no context, there’s no pain, there’s no hurt, there’s no problem, there’s no difficulty that He doesn’t understand. And He’s able to minister, and He’s able to give words of wisdom and words of encouragement and words of strength. He’s able to reach down into the depths of that problem and give help and support and relief, and a peace that passes all understanding. He’s a Wonderful Counselor.

First, this means he is a reliable counselor. Those who come to him will never be led astray. People like Joyce Brothers, Dear Abby, Ann Landers, Dr. Laura, and Dr. Phil all make their living giving advice to others. But they cannot claim perfection. Psychiatrists routinely make from \$100 to \$500 an hour for their counsel. Much of it is good ... some not so much. But the Lord goes to no one for advice. And when anyone comes to Him, He gives them the counsel they need.

And think of how the New Testament and how Isaiah and how other parts of Scripture ascribe this kind of divine wondrous heavenly wisdom to Jesus Christ. God made His counsel wonderful and His wisdom great. We read in **1 Corinthians 1:30**, “*And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us **wisdom from God**, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*”

And then we’re told in **Colossians 2:3**, “*in whom [Christ] are hidden all the **treasures of wisdom and knowledge.***”

And even the prophet Isaiah will tell us, **Isaiah 53:11**, “*Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied; **by His knowledge** shall the righteous one, My servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities,*” because He knows exactly what is needed to save sinners.

He is therefore the perfect teacher and the ultimate counselor. This gives us insight into His working. His plans are not our plans, His ways not our ways. He will accomplish things beyond human comprehension and He will do it in ways we cannot fathom. He will do the greatest work ever accomplished and He will do it successfully. A violent death would not be man’s way to victory but it was God’s plan and our Lord carried it out perfectly.

Let me apply the truth this way. As the Wonderful Counselor, He gives wholesome direction to His people. Those who follow Him will not walk in darkness but in the blazing light of day, just as we saw last week in **Isaiah 9:2**, “*The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.*” In this tiny baby we see all the wisdom of God wrapped in swaddling clothes.

And so here’s the first attribute of the King: He is a Wonderful Counselor in contrast to the un-wisdom of earthly kings who have led God’s people into peril and into destruction. He will lead them in wisdom and His wisdom is wondrous.

He is a Wonderful Counselor. He’s also the ...

MIGHTY GOD: THE NAME OF POWER

This speaks of the “Power of Accomplishment.” It is first of all a statement of deity. The

baby born in the manger is not just the Son of God, He's also God the Son. All the fullness of God dwells in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the ancient creeds declare, He is "very God of very God." That can never be said of any mere human baby.

There is something else important in this title. The word translated "mighty" is the word *gibor*, which means "strong one" or "the powerful, valiant warrior." Thus the term "**Mighty God,**" *El Gibbor*, is actually a military title. He is the God who fights for His people! God's answer to everything that has ever terrorized us ... is a child. The power of God is so far superior to the Assyria's and all the big shots of this world that He can defeat them by coming as a mere child. His answer to the bullies swaggering through history is not to become an even bigger bully. His answer is Jesus. At the Incarnation, God took the form of human flesh. That's why one of his names is *Immanuel* — *God with us*. Now take the first two titles together and what do you have? As the Wonderful Counselor — He makes the Plans. As the Mighty God — He makes the plans Work.

All of his wonderful plans will be carried out with all of God's infinite might. There is in this little baby all the strength of Deity. The power of God is in those tiny fists. He has strength which is divine. The omnipotence of God is at His commands. Whatever He desires, He is able to achieve.

I apply it this way. When we meet Jesus, we meet God. If He's not the "**Mighty God,**" then we're deceived and it's blasphemy to worship Him. There's no middle ground here. If he's not God, we are fools to worship Him. If he is God, we are fools not to.

If Jesus is nothing but a man, then all we do at Christmas is in vain. At this point it's important that we not give in to the sentimental nonsense that makes Christmas a kind of feel-good, ecumenical holiday. **Christmas** is the great dividing line of the human race. No wonder some people want all mention of Christmas expunged from our public life. They understand that Christmas is based on the belief that at Bethlehem **the God Incarnate** was born. If that's not true, then we're not only wasting our time this morning, we're actually deluded and deceived. We are of all men most to be pitied.

But if He is the Mighty God, then when we rely on Him we are relying on God Himself! He is the Mighty God because we need divine wisdom and divine power to help us in our battle. Satan and sin would every day defeat us ... but He is the Mighty God and He has already defeated them.

In this tiny baby we see **the power of God** sleeping on Mary's lap. And so we see wisdom and power, but we also see love, because He is our ...

EVERLASTING FATHER: THE NAME OF LOVE

In the Hebrew the phrase is literally "the Father of Eternity." This speaks of the purpose of His coming. He is before, above, and beyond time. He's the possessor of eternity. He's eternally like a father to His people. This is not a statement about the Trinity, but about the **character** of our Lord.

All that a good father is, Jesus is to His people. Because He's like a father, He cares for His people. Because He owns eternity, He can give us eternal life. That's so important for those of us who live on this sin-cursed planet. No one lives forever. Sooner or later we'll all find our own place in the graveyard. We're not immortal, but transitory. We're here today, gone tomorrow. A dead Christ will do us no good. **Dying** men need an **undying** Christ.

Here's a key phrase: **He is a father forever!** That's important to me because I have a father, and my father is one of my heroes, but he is not a father forever. My father had a father,

but he is gone now. LTC William Irving Silvernail was a good man, but he was not a father forever. He had a father, my great-grandfather, William Andrus Silvernail, but he was not a father forever. In fact, he was gone before I was born. I am a father as well ... I'm a father to David (who's a father), Rebecca, Sarah, Daniel, and Samuel, and a father-in-law to Rachel, John, and Andy (who will soon be a father), but still ... I'm not a father forever. I will someday pass away. All human fathers must go. But **Jesus is a father forever!** He's just what we need. It means His love is forever. It will never pass away.

When my children need anything, I will run to help them. If they cry, I go. If they want me, I will come to them. I never kick them out (at least not yet). They belong to me. They are my children. My sons bear my name. What I am in a **poor** way to them, Jesus is in a **perfect** way to all who believe in Him.

In this tiny baby we see the love of God sleeping in a stable. Wisdom, Power, Love, and finally, we see that He is the ...

PRINCE OF PEACE: THE NAME OF BLESSING

The phrase literally means "the prince whose coming brings peace." This speaks of the effect of His coming. This final title is the climax of all that has gone before. The word "**Prince**" means something like "The Son of the Sovereign." It speaks of His high position. The word "**peace**" speaks of His basic nature.

Recently I read that there are more wars raging right now than at any time in the last century. All over the globe there are ethnic conflicts and tribal wars. Closer to home not a day goes by without word that someone else has been murdered in Metropolitan Washington. We see so much killing that it no longer surprises us — or even bothers us. We've been immune to violence because **we live** in a violent world. **Isaiah 9:6** tells us that God's plan for world peace is focused on a one person — a baby asleep in a manger in Bethlehem. He is the ultimate man of peace. In the past, His coming made peace with God. In the present, those who come to Him find peace when Christ enters in. In the future, His coming again will usher in a kingdom of peace.

There is no peace today ... so much strife and bloodshed. But He's not a failure. We are. The ideal has not yet come. Peace is a wonderful thing, but hard to find in this world. It's worth working for and waiting for. God's ultimate plan for peace rests not in treaties or lessons or progress or material prosperity. God's plan for Peace is the Maker of Peace, Jesus Christ.

And Jesus Himself promised to bring peace, **John 14:27**, "**Peace** I leave with you; my **peace** I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

And the Apostle Paul wrote in **Romans 5:1**, "*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" And then again in **Ephesians 2:14**, "*For He Himself is our **peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility.*"

One writer put this way: The **methods** of Christ are methods of peace. The **men** of Christ are men of peace. The **kingdom** of Christ is a kingdom of peace. The **principles** of Christ are principles of peace. To know Him is to know blessing and happiness. To live without Him is to be, finally, restless and miserable.

He is no warrior, no greedy conqueror, no empire builder. He came to bring peace. He did. He does. He will. In this tiny baby we see the peace of God welcomed by angels and shepherds.

In this one verse you have the four names of Jesus. This is what they mean to us today: If you are confused ... He is the Wonderful Counselor. If you are weak ... He is the Mighty God. If you are scared ... He is the Everlasting Father. If you are disturbed ... He is the Prince of Peace.

The year was 1809 and a traveler was passing through Kentucky. He stopped at a store and asked, "Anything happen around here, lately?" "No, nothing ever happens around here. There was a baby born out at the Lincoln cabin last night – that's all." Just a baby at the Lincoln cabin — his name was Abraham.

You never know what may happen in the world because a baby was born. Even Mary couldn't fully imagine what it all meant that night. But that baby born in Bethlehem has become the centerpiece of human history. We even divide time itself by His coming — B.C. and A.D.

CONCLUSION: *The Ministry of Presence*³

One of the things they try to teach you in seminary is called *The Ministry of Presence*. That sometimes it's not so much what you say, or what you do, but simply being there. One professor told me that it was learning how to show up ... and then shut up. It's usually something that's learned the hard way.

I got the most recent issue of *Covenant*, the magazine of Covenant Theological Seminary, in the mail this week ... and I thought you might be interested in this one particle article. So allow me to read it to you ...

"As the St. Louis Arch appeared on the horizon, it suddenly hit me — I was finally going to seminary! I wondered what amazing things I would learn from my professors. How would the Lord use my classes to change me? Little did I know that one of my most precious lessons would be learned in a restaurant parking lot. Christine and I had already been on a few dates, and this time we were enjoying burgers at a nearby restaurant. When it came time to pay the bill, I reached for my wallet only to find an empty pocket. "Unbelievable!" I exclaimed. "Forgot it again!" As I left to retrieve my wallet from the car, Christine went to wash her hands.

These seemingly insignificant details led to an encounter that impacted us both greatly. Isn't it amazing how the accumulation of split second decisions can shape our lives? On this night, it included me picking Christine up late and taking lots of pictures. What if we had taken one less? What would be different if I had remembered my wallet? Any little change in God's mysterious and glorious sovereignty and Christine probably would never have seen "her."

When I returned to the table, I wasn't prepared for what I found. Instead of the gregarious, fun-loving Christine, I found a pale, shaking shell of a woman whose only words were: "I could have sworn I just saw Rachel."

We had barely made it to the car when Christine began shaking and weeping in the passenger seat. My brain raced as I tried to find something to say or do. Should I share a Scripture verse? Should I pray out loud for Christine? This was a big deal, so what if I blew it? If I messed up, would this relationship be over?

Amid my own powerlessness and helplessness, I found myself reflecting upon Christine's story. Rachel was a girl that Christine had met while doing youth ministry at Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. She was the one Christine had led to the Lord and then discipled. Rachel was also the 16-year-old whom Christine watched slowly die from

3 The Conclusion has adapted material from the article, "*The Ministry of Presence*," *Covenant*, Fall-Winter 2011, page 26.

the ravages of cancer. Now, years later at a St. Louis restaurant, it was Rachel whom Christine had seen in another young teenage face.

As I entered into Christine's story, my own heart began to break. I was overwhelmed by the pain and sorrow she was feeling. What could I possibly say to her in this moment? What could come out of my mouth that could take away her pain or bring her healing? Only the Holy Spirit could warm the bitter chill of the winds of past wounds. So I said absolutely nothing. Instead, I quietly and gently held her hand and simply wept with her.

That's where one of my most important lessons at Covenant Seminary took place — in a Toyota Camry in a restaurant parking lot. It was there that I learned that caring for a broken heart sometimes means opening my mouth less and my heart more, that gospel ministry can simply be taking someone's hand and mourning with the person. That night, I learned the power of the ministry of presence." Written by **Thomas Rubino (M.Div., MAC '10)**

After meeting and marrying the love of his life, Tom graduated from Covenant Seminary in 2010. He recently accepted the position of Assistant Pastor at Potomac Hills Presbyterian Church in Leesburg, Virginia. Tom, Christine, and their daughter, Bella, will transition to their new church home in January 2012.

This will be good for our church. And our church will be good for them.

You see, the ministry of presence flows both ways. But it's not just something that **we do**. It's not reserved for pastors, elders, or deacons. It's not even something that's particularly human.

You see, I think the most important part of our verse today might just be the first three words ... **"For to us."** You see, this verse is God's gift to us. **It is His Ministry of Presence**. He came to be **Immanuel** — **"God With Us."**

The gift of the Christ child is a personal gift from God to us. A gift requires a response. If I put a gift under your tree, you may acknowledge it, may admire it, may even thank me for it, but it isn't yours until you open it and take it for your own. And God has a Christmas gift for you ... not wrapped in bright paper and fancy ribbon, but in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. It is the gift of His Son. It is a gift for you. The gift is still there. It must be received personally. You can never truly enjoy Christmas until you can look in the Father's face and tell Him you have received His Christmas gift.

In his famous Christmas carol "*O Little Town of Bethlehem*," Phillips Brooks has a stanza that is a delight at this point ...

*How silently, How silently
the wondrous gift was given
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heaven
No ear may hear his coming
but in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive him still
The Dear Christ enters in.*

Today we are reminded, once again, of the promise of God, "*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.*" Look at Jesus. As the Wonderful Counselor, He has the best ideas and strategies. Let's follow Him. As the Mighty God, He defeats His enemies easily. Let's hide behind Him. As the Everlasting Father, He loves

us endlessly. Let's enjoy Him. As the Prince of Peace, He reconciles us while we are still His enemies. Let's welcome His dominion.

Think about Him ... because He's **there** ... He is **present** ... for you.

You need to pray. Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Oh Lord, our Lord. Thank You that You are a Wonderful Counselor ... to us, who are in such great need of the whole counsel of God. Thank You that You are a Mighty God ... to us, who are in such great need of Your power, since we're filled with such overwhelming weakness. Thank You that You are the Everlasting Father ... to us, who so desperately need to be loved, despite being so unlovable. And thank You that You are the Prince of Peace, the Son of the Sovereign, who makes peace with God ... for us ... by the blood of the Cross.

Lord, here there is so much grace, given to us ... the undeserving. Lord thank You that no one is beyond Your grace. Thank You that we're not beyond Your grace. Thank You that the blood of Jesus covers our sins. For we pray, in the Name of Your Son, Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

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Jeremiah 23:5

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”