

TO US A SON IS GIVEN

Isaiah 9:1-7

Key Verse: 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.

Christmas today is commercialized. Black Friday and Cyber Monday signal the season is here. Many people are preoccupied with gift buying that they forget why we celebrate Christmas. Some even celebrate Christmas without Christ. It is like having hamburger without the beef, computer without CPU, or heart without love. We cannot have the true joy of Christmas if we do that. All the excitement will quickly fade away and we may suffer holiday blues afterwards.

In today's scripture, the Prophet Isaiah teaches us why we celebrate Christmas. He teaches us who Jesus is. Let me ask you a personal question. Who is Jesus to you? Is he a friend, a teacher, a doctor, or a career advisor? Isaiah proclaims that Jesus is called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." May God help each of us to have the joy of knowing Jesus personally this Christmas!

I. A LIGHT HAS DAWNED (1-5)

Look at verse 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."* Historically, the district of Galilee, which included Zebulun and Naphtali, was the most vulnerable and neglected part of Israel. When the Assyrians invaded Israel, they first destroyed Galilee before advancing to the south. They engaged in horrible atrocities there. They took men, women and children to Assyria to use them as their slaves (2Ki 15:29).

Because of this, people called Galilee a land of gloom. When Philip met Jesus personally, he invited his friend Nathanael to the Messiah, calling him "Jesus of Nazareth." Immediately Nathanael asked, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (Jn 1:45-46). Nathanael did not think Nazareth in Galilee was a special place. Philip did not argue with him. He simply said, "Come and see."

Galilee was oppressed and despised. People there lived in gloom and distress. But things were about to change. Galilee would become a beautiful place forever. How? The Messiah would come and start his ministry there. As Isaiah prophesied, Jesus came and spent most of his earthly life in Galilee. He raised his twelve disciples there. Except Judas Iscariot the betrayer, all his disciples were from Galilee. The land of gloom became a land of honor because of his beautiful ministry there. Many Christians of the world visit this holy land to trace the footsteps of our Lord Jesus.

It was in Galilee Jesus changed the life of a man named Levi. As a young man, Levi had a noble dream for his future. But in order to survive in the land of gloom, he hardened his heart and chose to be a tax collector for the Romans. People hated him for betraying his own country for money. Levi thought he would be happy if he had money. But he was not happy, because no one wanted to be friends with him. He was lonely. One day, Levi was sitting alone in his tax collector's booth, thinking about his unhappy life. Everyone passed by him. But Jesus understood his agony in life. Jesus came to him and said, "Follow me." Levi had been following his desire for money. Now Jesus invited him to follow the Messiah. Levi was deeply moved by the love of the Messiah who did not condemn him but gave him a new direction in life. Immediately he got up and followed him. He did not mind giving up his lucrative job. He was happy to have a purpose in life. This selfish man was transformed into St. Matthew. He wrote the words of Christ in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew had lived in gloom because of his selfishness. But his life was blessed when he followed Jesus.

Of course, Galilee isn't the only place that has been blessed. Wherever Jesus touches the lives of people, the place becomes a land of hope. Shippensburg is no special place. People may ask, "Can anything good come from Shippensburg?" But in God's eyes, this is a special place when young people come to Jesus with humble learning minds and grow to be disciples of Jesus.

Look at verse 2. *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."* The people were walking in darkness. Isaiah used the words such as "the yoke," "the rod of their oppressor," and "the warrior's boot" to describe their situation (3-4). They were suffering greatly because of the military oppression and economic hardship. Now, however, something wonderful was about to happen. The yoke that burdened them would be shattered. The warrior's boot would be used to make fire. The people would see a great light. A light has dawned in the land of deep darkness. Isaiah was so certain about this that he used the present-perfect tense to describe the future event. So when and how was his prophecy fulfilled? It was fulfilled when Jesus came (Mt 4:14). The gospel of Matthew quotes this very Scripture to describe the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Matthew 4:15-17 read: *"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond 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 has come near."*

There was a woman who had lived in darkness, not because of military oppression or poverty, but because of her sin. One night, she committed adultery with a man, not knowing Pharisees were watching her to catch her in the act. It was a setup to trap Jesus. They brought her to Jesus early the next morning and asked him if they should stone her to death according to the Law of Moses. But Jesus knew what they were doing. He said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." At this, they left one by one, acknowledging they were all sinners before God. Then Jesus told the woman, "...neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave

your life of sin.” Jesus gave her a second chance. He shined a light in her life. She was no longer in darkness of sin. She had a new direction in life. Jesus declared: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12).

Are you in darkness? Do you feel like you are groping in darkness without clear direction in life? Come to Jesus. He will shine his light in your life. You don’t have to walk in darkness any longer.

II. FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN (6-7)

The people were living in darkness. They were living in the land of the shadow of death. What did God do to help them? Isaiah proclaimed: *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders”* (6a). Now, if you were suffering from foreign military oppression and abject poverty, what kind of help would you expect from God? A missile defense system to fend off military invasion? A mega lottery jackpot to solve all your money problems? When we help someone in trouble, the first we think of is to offer assistance to improve the situation. However, God’s answer was different. He sent his son! How amazing is this? To us a son is given! He didn’t just give a solution that would improve our situation. He sent his own son to take care of us. Sending a child to help may sound strange to some people. Spiritually, however, this is a permanent solution to our problems, not a Band-Aid solution. Why? It is because our real problem in life is not political or economic. It is a sickness in our soul called sin. Sin breaks our relationship with God, the source of our lives, and with each other. The wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23). No amount of money, no advanced technology, can solve this horrible problem called sin, except one person, Jesus Christ our Lord. God loves us so much that he sent his son to save us from sin and death.

Jesus was born to a humble family of Mary and Joseph. But he was no ordinary child. The government would be on his shoulders. In other words, Jesus came to be our king. But his kingdom is not from this world (Jn 18:36-37). Jesus’ kingdom is different from worldly kingdoms. Look at 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.”* When Jesus was born, Caesar ruled his kingdom with his military power. But Jesus our king rules with his love, peace, justice and righteousness. His kingdom is also an everlasting kingdom. In its prime, the Roman Empire looked so mighty that no one ever thought that it would collapse someday. But it is gone. There are only ruins. Only the kingdom of God is forever.

Let us read verse 6 together. *“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.”* Let us think about who Jesus is.

First, Wonderful Counselor. A high school guidance counselor can help you with your college applications. But Jesus is a different kind of counselor. He is Wonderful

Counselor because he shows us the way. He is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). He gives us a direction in life in this confusing world. We can come to him and ask his guidance as we make many small and big decisions in life. Sometimes, we hear young people say, “You don’t understand me. You don’t care!” You know what? There is someone who knows you personally and cares for you. He understands what you are going through in life.

There was a woman in Samaria who was bitter because no one understood her. She was thirsty for love. She thought she would be happy only if she married her prince charming. But her husband turned out to be an abusive toad rather than a prince. She divorced him and married another man hoping he would love her. But she was disappointed again. And again. She married five times and divorced five times. Now she was living with a boyfriend. People pointed their finger at her, calling her a whore. No one even tried to understand her. One day, she went to a village well to draw water in the heat of the day to avoid meeting people. To her surprise, there was a Jewish man sitting beside the well. He asked, “Will you give me a drink?” She thought it was a bad pick-up line and tried to ignore him. But he encouraged her to see her life in God’s light and even offered her living water welling up to eternal life. Through their long 1:1 Bible study, she realized that it was the Messiah who was talking to her. What moved her heart most was that he knew all about her sinful life, but he did not condemn her. He understood her and counseled her. He forgave her. She was so happy that she left her water jar behind and went to the townspeople to tell them about the Messiah. She said, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” (Jn 4:29)

Second, Mighty God. Jesus came to this world as a tiny baby laid in a manger. But his birth was the coming of the Mighty God. Why should the Mighty God come to us? He came to take care of us. God often delegates various tasks to his angels. He also allows the law of nature to run its course with only occasional interference. However, for the most critical work, God does not delegate to anyone. He does it himself. What is this work? It is the work of saving sinners like us from the bondage to sin and death. Without this work, all human beings are doomed to eternal condemnation. We all have an appointment with Dr. Death. We can cancel many appointments. But no one can cancel this appointment with death. So the Mighty God came to this world to save us from death. This is the promise of Jesus: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (Jn 5:24). We don’t have to fear death when we have faith in Jesus who is the Mighty God.

Third, Everlasting Father. Earlier this year, we were saddened to learn that one of our Bible students lost his father to an automobile accident. He and his dad were very close. They had many camping trips together. Then suddenly his father left without saying goodbye to him. I grieved with him. I am also sad to see many young people in our society grow up without father at home. But we have a father who never disappoints us. He never leaves us. He is our Everlasting Father. Jesus welcomes us as his own sons and daughters. One day Jesus was preaching the word of God to many people gathered

in a house when four men brought a paralytic to him. The man was lying on a mat. He did not smell good because he could not take a shower. People avoided eye contact with the man. But Jesus said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mk 2:5). Jesus called him "Son." He accepted him as his own son. He healed him by saying, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Jesus gave him a new life. He became a child of God.

Statistics show that 25 percent of American children grow up without a father at home. We can almost hear the silent cries of these children at night. Some of us still have our human fathers who are good to us. But we know that none of them can be with us forever. Only Jesus is our Everlasting Father. He promised, "I will not leave you as orphans" (Jn 14:18). He also said, "Surely I will be with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Jesus is our Father who will love us forever.

Fourth, Prince of Peace. This year, I was encouraged to hear that South and North Korea took steps to bring peace to the Korean peninsula. They dismantled many military outposts along the DMZ. However, not many people are holding breath to think that this is the end of hostility between the two. We know from history that peace agreement does not always bring peace. The signed peace agreement between Israel and PLO did not bring peace there. Political compromise does not bring peace. True peace comes from God. We can have peace with others when we have peace with God. One Bible student said to me, "I thought I would have peace if I studied the Bible. But how come I have more trouble in my mind?" He was referring to the uneasy feeling he had when the word of God convicted him of his sins. No one can have true peace until his sins are forgiven by Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Romans 5:1-2 says: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

How can we have peace in this age of anxiety? Only Jesus, the Prince of Peace, can give us peace that will last. Jesus promised, "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" (Jn 14:27). God gives peace to those who put their hope in the Prince of Peace. When we have peace with God, through repentance and faith in Jesus, we can have peace in our hearts even as we go through storms of life. We can also find the strength to forgive those who cause much pain in our hearts.

We learned today Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Why does Jesus have many names? It is because Jesus is God who can help us no matter what situation we may be in. Jesus is the light of life to those who are in darkness. Jesus is the bread of life to those who are hungry. There is no one Jesus cannot help. Jesus is everything to us. May God help each of us to have the joy of knowing this Jesus personally and serving him!