

What Child Is This?

*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.”
(Matthew 1:21 ESV)*

*“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy
that will be for all the people.”
(Luke 2:10 ESV)*

The King To Come

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Isaiah 9:6-7

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Introduction:

Christmas has a way of sparking JOY in our hearts. Doesn't it? We get together. We DELIGHT in each other. We fuel our friendships with tasty treats—WAY too many. And our kids tug like new puppies, eager to be unleashed on their presents.

But it's not like that for everyone.

Christmas can dredge up loneliness. Distress. Even despair. What is it that brings a cloud over your Christmas or sits on your chest like a lead weight?

- Is it family? Someone you miss? Or, someone who's no joy to be around?
- Is it finances? Fear about tomorrow?
- Is it a memory you wish you could undo? Or world news you wish you could shut out?

How do you capture a sense of joy, when life—when the world—goes bleak like that?

God's timeless Word to us this morning takes us back 27 centuries to a time that was particularly BLEAK. DISTRESS and ANGUISH choked the air.

This was because the king in charge was wayward and weak. For 140 years, the nation of Judah had flown beautifully with a succession of four good and godly kings at the controls. But when

King Ahaz stepped into the cockpit, he pushed his nation into a steep 16-year nose dive!¹ He promoted idolatry on every street corner. He left his nation vulnerable to a military disaster that left no family untouched. Instead of running to God for help, Ahaz scrambled to stave off threats, by ransacking God’s temple treasures and buying protection from a bigger bully, godless Assyria. He was so intimidated by Assyria, that in the end Ahaz closed the temple doors and worship of the Living God was SHUT DOWN.

When the king goes astray, everyone suffers.

Only two good kings would come after Ahaz, giving Judah some lift. But the general trajectory from Ahaz on ... would be a turbulent DOWN, DOWN and DOWN.

God’s prophet Isaiah foresaw this downward trend and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit prophesied about a KING TO COME—a king unlike Ahaz. An incomparable king. A king who would take his people UP.

Let’s turn our attention to that prophecy—to God’s promise of

The King To Come

Open your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 9 (on page 573 of your church Bibles). Our focus will be on verses 6 and 7, verses that may sound familiar, like a Christmas jingle that rings then fades with the season. But my prayer is that AS WE GAZE on this promise in light of the distressing times it was addressed into, it will GRIP and HOLD our hearts for ANY dark or distressing time we might face ... now or ahead.

Let’s go back to Isaiah 8:19 to get a good running start. God’s Word begins:

¹⁹ And when they² say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because **they have no dawn.** ²¹ They will pass through the land, **greatly distressed** and hungry. And when they are hungry,

¹ Cf. 2 Kings 16:1-20 and 2 Chronicles 28:1-27

² They who rebuff the Lord and His Word (v5) like King Ahaz had a habit of doing.

they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God and turn their faces upward. 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.** (Isaiah 8:19-22, ESV)

Chapter 9 pivots.

¹ BUT there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. **In the former time** he [God] 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. (Isaiah 9:1, ESV)

It will help you to know that Zebulun and Naphtali were outlyers, two tribes on the northern fringe of Israel. That made them vulnerable to invaders much like a schoolchild is to bullies on the far fence of a playground. That was the kind of contempt they endured 'in the former time.' But in the 'latter time' God would make things glorious for this region. This land beyond the Jordan, would go from gloomy to glorious, because HERE, seven centuries later, in this very region of Galilee, Jesus would begin his formal ministry.

The Gospel writer Matthew (4:15-16) quotes these verses from Isaiah as he points to Jesus, saying.

- 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.
- 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.
- ⁴ For 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.
- ⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
 and every garment rolled in blood
 will be burned as fuel for the fire. (Isaiah 9:2-5, ESV)

What a joy-filled picture that is!

How could such light, such joy, such freedom, such victory break out of such deep, dark oppression?

Answer?

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.
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. (Isaiah 9:6-7, ESV)

God's promise came at the perfect time, to penetrate GLOOM with the HOPE of **an incomparable KING TO COME**.

Who is this king?

V6 answers:

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given; (Isaiah 9:6a, ESV)

God planned to dispel distress and break the burden of oppression with ... a CHILD.

Why? Why a child?

Look back at v4. See how God promised to break the rod of the oppressor ‘as on the day of Midian’? What did God mean by that? Do you remember the story of Gideon? In the days of the judges, God’s people were overrun by a hoard of Midianites (‘thick as locusts’). Remember how God whittled Gideon’s army down from a not-so-impressive 30 thousand compared to the 135,000 they would have to tussle with, down to a band of 300. And God wouldn’t even let them take their swords. Why?

The Lord said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ (Judges 7:2, ESV)

God *specializes* in rescue through weak, insignificant agents. JUST AS in the day of Gideon when GOD broke the oppression of Midian with a small unarmed bunch, God wanted the coming of THIS CHILD (another seemingly insignificant agent) to demonstrate:

This can only be the work of God.

A child born. A son given. That’s WHO the king to come would be.

As Isaiah sketched out this promise, he had no clue how precise this language from God really was. Looking back through the lens of God’s complete revelation we can see that these hints give the ESSENCE of an astonishing picture: This child born, this son given ... is none other than JESUS ... the ETERNAL Son of God ...

who had no beginning ...

who always was WITH GOD ...

who always was GOD ...

and could therefore only be GIVEN ... by God the Father ... SENT into time and space to become A CHILD BORN. A baby, with a beginning.

Who is this King? He’s

1. The Incomparable God-Man

... FIRST and FOREMOST. God incarnate. Think of it!

"The omnipotent, in one instant, made himself breakable. He who had been spirit became pierceable. He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. And he who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl. God as a fetus. Holiness sleeping in a womb. (Max Lucado, *"God Came Near,"* pp. 25).

One preacher put it like this:

As an infant, God learned to crawl, to stand and to walk.

As a boy, God probably felt the pain of getting picked on and had to learn his ABC's.

As a youth, he probably had pimples, body odor, and bad breath. He went through puberty!

As a carpenter, he hit his thumb with a hammer and faced complaining clients even though his work was always flawless.³

Why? Why would this KING COME like that? To prove "this can ONLY be the work of God" ... yes! ... but also,

¹⁷ ... he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, **so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest** in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 2:17, ESV)

He felt his thumb throb; how can he not feel the ache in your soul?

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable **to sympathize with our weaknesses**, but one who **in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin**. (Hebrews 4:15, ESV)

³ Adapted from Sam Storms, *"Seven Gifts from God"* sermon on Isaiah 9:6

What an incomparable King! **Jesus the GOD – MAN.** GOD came near. GOD entered our gloom.

He KNOWS.

He UNDERSTANDS.

He can HELP. Like no other can.

But, he's so much more. V6 goes on:

and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called

Wonderful Counselor,

Mighty God,

Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6b, ESV)

These four double-descriptors trumpet the sum of the GOD-MAN's character. They herald the perfection of his person. His excellencies. These QUALIFICATIONS make Jesus a STANDOUT king.

Look at them! He's a

2. Wonderful Counselor

When that word 'wonderful' is used in the OT, it almost always points to someone *beyond* human, someone *supernatural*. This future King's teaching and guidance and counsel, Isaiah says pointing forward, won't draw on earthly wisdom. It will be OF GOD.

So when Jesus started to teach, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17) he pointed to himself as this king. When he spoke, his hearers were astonished, because in contrast to the limp lessons they were used to hearing, Jesus taught with authority. He could

speak to Nicodemus about how to enter the kingdom of God, because he CAME from there and could speak firsthand of heavenly things!

His counsel was wonderful!

I frequently feel my shortcomings as a pastor; I don't have all the answers. Yet Jesus could counsel flawlessly. He never had to retract a word. He could decipher the thoughts of his enemies and unveil their hearts with a simple question. He used parables (simple stories with a point) to unlock the truth for those childlike faith, but also to lock it away and put it out of reach for the proud.

King Ahaz's counsel led his people to ruin. But JESUS? Listen, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life" (Jn 10:27-28)

It is because of [God] that we are "in Christ Jesus, **who has become to us wisdom from God**, righteousness and sanctification and redemption." (1 Cor 1:30, ESV)

Look at that wisdom! What higher counsel could ever make us right with God, empower us to grow in godliness, and reach down to rescue us from sin, Satan, and death?

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?" (Romans 11:33-34, ESV)

Jesus IS that wisdom. Do you see what a standout King He is? What a wonderful, WONDERFUL COUNSELLOR!

So let me ask: Do you tune in—lock in—on his voice? Are you following Him into life?

He's not just the Wonderful Counsellor, **He is also**

3. Mighty God

For Isaiah, what would truly qualify this KING TO COME is that he'd be more than a mere man. Jesus was FULLY man alright—He got so physically drained he slept hard in the hull of a storm-tossed boat. His disciples shook him, "Don't you care we're about to drown?" As 100% MIGHTY GOD, He stood to his feet and stilled the raging sea ... the way he had launched the universe into existence ... with a word.

Who else could open a blind man's eyes then say, "I am the light of the world? Follow me and you won't walk in darkness but have the light of life."

Who else could feed 5,000 from a lunch bag then say, "I am the bread that came down from heaven? Eat of me and you'll never go hungry again."

Who on earth could raise a friend from the dead and say, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Who else could truthfully say, "Before Abraham was, I AM"?

Who else has sovereignty over angels and demons, over every earthly power such that one day EVERY KNEE in heaven, on earth, and under the earth will bow to Him?

Only MIGHTY GOD. What a King!

Let me ask you: Does He have your complete allegiance? Are you fully surrendered to him?

This God-Man, Wonderful Counsellor... Mighty God ... is more. He's also the

4. Everlasting Father

Don't get confused. The term "father" used to describe Jesus here, is not used in a Trinitarian sense, to describe relationships within the Godhead. Isaiah is not saying that the Son is also the Father. That's a heresy called modalism that was denounced by the early church councils.

The term “father” in this phrase is a description, an analogy pointing to HOW Jesus rules His people. He governs us in a “father-like” way.

King Ahaz could have cared less for the good of his people and like the worst, most abusive father, he ruled them to their ruin. But King Jesus rules as a good king should, with care and compassion, with tenderness and affection. He WELCOMED little children to jump into His arms. He provides. He protects.

You and I are only used to earthly rulers who have term limits and life spans. They rise to power, they rule for good or ill, then they lose an election or they die. The next one takes over, and undoes or redoes what the first one did. And we call that PROGRESS!

What better care could we ever receive, what more certain security than to be protected and provided for by a King who we never elected ... who has no term limits ... who lives to care for us with no end of days. Because HIS is an INDESTRUCTIBLE life, His father-like care for us will continue in perpetuity.

What a standout KING he is!

Let me ask you: Do you REST in his care ... can you RELAX in His compassion?

But He’s more! He’s the

5. Prince of Peace

Oh, how we need a leader qualified to finally and fully bring this about!

How we need for hostilities to cease in our raging world.

How we need for our families to forgive and bury every last resentful record of wrong.

How we need relief in our anxious minds, calm in our fear-fueled emotions, and gladness in our souls.

But JESUS IS all that ...

¹⁴ ... **he himself is our peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. (Ephesians 2:14, ESV)

Jesus breaks the rage between nations, the estrangement in families!

But He's more ...

We have **peace WITH GOD** through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1b, ESV)

In Him, our souls are unshackled, our sin record erased, every last trace of guilt is removed as far as east is from west. And we're brought back ... reconciled to our Maker. Where BEFORE we were FOES; now we're FAMILY.

No Nobel Peace Prize recipient can claim ANYTHING close to that.

One day Our Incomparable King will return. At His second coming He will subdue all opposition, judge all evil, and ultimately PEACE WILL REIGN on the earth.

What a standout King Jesus is! THE INCOMPARABLE GOD-MAN is fully and forever qualified as A Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Given such excellencies ...

What Difference Will He Make?

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. (Isaiah 9:7a)

History has never seen anything like this! It's hard to conceive of. All we see are economies that expand and contract. Markets that boom and bust. Despots that steam roll other nations then ... come to nothing.

With Jesus as King, we will experience unstoppable, ever-expanding prosperity and peace. Undiminished harmony and wholeness. Think of it—PERFECT PEACE. In our hearts! On the earth! Jesus will rule in fulfillment of God's longstanding covenant promise to David (in 2 Samuel 7). He will be the kind of King who loves what is right and hates what is wrong. Every

historic injustice, systemic or personal will finally ... be set right. Righteousness will be the scepter of his kingdom (Ps 45:6 and Heb 1:8), and He will accomplish it perfectly, in practice and in principal.

If you've ever suffered false accusation, been scammed for a bundle, or fined unfairly. If you've ever COMMITTED such crimes run to Jesus for redemption, then THIS is your hope.

This hope will never fizzle. This will be ...

From this time forth and forever ... more.

It's hard to wrap your mind around that, isn't it?

But we've got a KING with the qualities who can MAKE IT SO.

On that quiet afternoon, when Gabriel, the angelic courier, knocked on Mary's door to deliver the extraordinary birth announcement of this KING's first coming (in Luke 1), that godly girl who had never known a man, who had no categories for what she was hearing, simply said:

How will this be?

How Will This Happen?

God answers that in the last phrase of v7.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:7b, ESV)

God underscores His promise with a guarantee.

The words "**Lord of hosts**" describes the God who created and commands ARMIES—armies of ANGELS. He has these supernaturally powerful warriors at his call, ready to obey his will. That would be a powerful way to pull off such a promise! But it's not the basis of this guarantee.

Something else about God guarantees he will do this. See it? **The ZEAL of the Lord of hosts will do this.**

God doesn't need a legion of angels. His zeal, his ardent love, his fiery passion to unfold his unstoppable purpose for the people he loves ... is enough to pull this off.

God so LOVED the world, is why He sent His only Son the first time. His unstoppable love, his protective covenant commitment for you and me that will bring it to completion.

God personally guarantees THIS KING TO COME.

Do you see how SURE your hope is?

One commentor drives this home better than I can:

When our days grow dark or distressing, we have to decide what reading of our experiences to live by. The darkness and the distress are real, but they are not the only reality nor the fundamental reality. In any given situation, we can either sink into despair or rise to faith and hope. (J. Alec Motyer)

Christian, however Christmas plays for you, whatever your joy or gloom, you and I can rest in this fundamental reality: We have an incomparably qualified King who came once as promised, and who IS TO COME, guaranteed by God's unstoppable, ardent love for you.

To YOU this child is born, **to YOU** this son is given!

Merry Christmas.

Let's pray.