

## **Christmas Eve Meditations – December 24, 2022**

### John 6:68-69

It is a special child whose birth we celebrate. Awaited for centuries, the anticipation grew as God's prophets revealed more and more about the Coming One. The message we heard from Isaiah a bit ago contained several names which we will consider as we marvel at the baby in the manger. Words from John's Gospel will guide us as we hear of the

#### WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

That word wonderful, an adjective as translated, could actually stand alone. It is literally "marvel," a miracle. That name certainly fits the person of our birthday celebrant. Jesus is the God-man: true God from all eternity and truly human, born this night. How it is possible we cannot fathom. We just marvel and adore him.

Marvelous or miraculous also fits his work. During his earthly ministry Jesus performed a host of miracles as he healed countless diseases, cast out demons, controlled the forces of nature, even raised the dead. And then he did the greatest of all possible feats as he rose from death himself.

Wonderful also is descriptive of the aspect we focus on in this segment of the service, that of being a counselor. The picture in the term "counselor" is someone being at your side to give advice and direction. At times in life we seek legal counsel to make sure the wording of a contract contains no unseen loopholes. We may hire a consultant when embarking on a major endeavor which we do not feel qualified to handle alone or when we want a fresh set of eyes to view a situation or to solve an impasse. Jesus provides just what we need, for life and for eternity. He does so in his Word. Its key message is the gospel, the good news of his life and death that provided all we need for entrance to heaven.

So he shared that good news as he journeyed around the land of Palestine back in the first century A.D. But not everyone was interested in what he had to say. That was the case in the verses before us. He had performed the miracle of feeding a crowd that numbered five thousand men, plus the rest of their families, starting with five loaves of bread and two small fish. All ate to their fill. The next day they caught up with him and were ready to make him a bread king, a handy provider of their daily diet.

The Savior explained his much higher purpose, providing food for souls, and their excitement soon vanished. So did many of the people. They grumbled about his hard teaching. The situation was so grim he posed the question that preceded the words before us. "'You do not want to leave too, do you?' Jesus asked the Twelve."

Because he is our Wonderful Counselor the question is unthinkable for believers. No other source of wisdom is equal. Peter put it correctly, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" There is no option. "You have the words of eternal life." That is what counts. What may look to us like a good, orderly and successful life will one day come crashing down to nothing a handful of decades later. Knowing Jesus and his words in faith brings the lasting benefit of life forever in heaven. His words convey the blessing promised.

So believe: trust in him as your only Savior from sin; place all your confidence in him. Hold him as your dearest treasure. Know him, through the experience of a personal connection.

We today may look to Jesus for the wrong reasons. Some view him as burial insurance, that a church funeral puts you on the inside track to heaven. Others seek a good education for their children in church schools. There may be a sense of duty; belonging to a church is what you're supposed to do. Moral direction is the way to a better life. All of those reasons may be true and bring benefits, but they are not the real reason we need Jesus. He is your Savior, the one who perfectly obeyed the law of God for you and paid the price for your sins. Know him, cling to his words and to the Savior they proclaim. There is no choice. He is your Wonderful Counselor.

### Luke 1:35

Parents dream about their child as soon as they know one is on the way. Before the use of ultrasound they wondered whether they would have a boy or a girl. Now they find out well in advance and hold gender reveal events. They still wonder, "What will our baby be like? What will he or she become?" Most hold high hopes, not planning on a bum or a criminal. Mary didn't have to wonder about the son to whom she would give birth. The angel Gabriel told her already when informing her she would become a mother. He would be special. He is

### MIGHTY GOD

The child whose coming Isaiah foretold would be conceived by the Holy Spirit as we confess in the creeds. It was a surprise for Mary. She received a visit from God's angel as she went about her ordinary life in Nazareth, preparing for her upcoming wedding to the carpenter Joseph. One day her life took an unexpected turn when God's angelic messenger appeared to her with the announcement that she would give birth to a son, fulfilling the promise that the Messiah would come in the family line of David. An obvious question came from her, "How will this be...since I am a virgin?" It was not physically, humanly possible.

The angel had an answer. God the Holy Spirit will make it happen. It wouldn't be a physical encounter but a conception by divine power. It is the wonder of Christmas, the miracle of the virgin birth. As Gabriel pointed out, "Nothing is impossible with God." That reminder was enough. Mary accepted the news and her role. We do, too, even though it is beyond comprehension. Christmas is a time for faith. We need a childlike faith. Many people say that Christmas is for children. May we all be trusting children of God!

Jesus was more than a baby. He is the Son of God, true God himself, now come to earth. He who is one with the Father and the Spirit from all eternity was now becoming incarnate. He is the Word made flesh.

He came for a purpose that was equally wonderful. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." God was carrying out his eternal plan to save the world. The birth of Jesus was the start of a journey that would lead to a cross on Calvary.

As God he is mighty. Like the name God denotes power so Jesus demonstrated it in his earthly life as he performed miracles. His power is unlimited. He left nothing undone. He is supreme over all.

There is a message to us. That baby in Bethlehem's manger is special in every way. He is not a weak infant but the masterful, mighty God. He is able to do all things. The good news is that this powerful one is on your side. He came for you. God keeps his Word as he did that promise to send the Savior. You can rely on him with full confidence. He will help, support and strengthen you against all odds and foes. You have safety and security under the one who is Mighty God.

### Psalm 103:11-13

Thinking of the Trinity and relationships within it is a mystery that puts our brains on overload. For example, fathers are older than their sons, but not in the Godhead. God the Father and God the Son are equal and both are eternal. So the next name that we consider from Isaiah's prophecy fits for Jesus. He is

#### EVERLASTING FATHER

Although we are celebrating the birth of the Christ child, he is not new. He could tell the people of Jerusalem, "Before Abraham was, I am." We date Abraham about 2100 B.C. but Jesus already existed as the eternal I AM. He has no beginning or end. The wreaths that adorn our church and homes symbolize that quality.

We observe the birthday of the child Jesus but not of the Son of God. The prophet Micah noted, "His origins are from of old, from ancient times."

When we say "father" many qualities come to mind. One of them is love. The psalm writer noted, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him." How high is the sky? I ask that not like a child's question but for us to ponder. It is incomprehensible. Astronomers peer into space through giant telescopes but they cannot see its end. That's the way God's love for us is: endless.

Another characteristic mentioned of our Father is compassion. The term describes pity or a tender feeling. It is aroused by weakness and suffering of those who are dear or needing help. Both apply here: we are dear to God's heart and need help.

God's qualities lead to actions. We think of giving gifts. Parents have been shopping and spending extra efforts to delight their children with Christmas gifts. Moms and dads can't always afford or find or know what gift is especially desired by their kids. Jesus stated, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" He gives the very best gifts.

Chief of them is forgiveness. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." We had no connection with our Father. Sin destroyed the relationship and we had strayed far from him. Yet like in the parable of the Lost Son, the father was waiting and watching for his son's return. Jesus seeks us as the Everlasting Father.

Be his child. Acknowledge your sins, trust Jesus as your Savior, receive his mercy and compassion. He seeks everyone. If you are not already, come into his family. His arms are outstretched, ready and waiting for you. If you are an estranged child who has been wandering,

know that your Lord awaits you as a loving father and wants you back in his family. May all of us live in the security of trusting our Everlasting Father to guard and bless us always.

### Isaiah 9:7

We view Christmas as a season of peace. Soft candlelight illuminates our rooms. Snowflakes cover the ground, at least in the white Christmases we dream of. Yet peace is often lacking. Nations are at odds. Political polarization divides our citizenry. Families are fractured by strife so holiday gatherings are strained or non-existent. We experience heartaches. Our work or neighborhood situation may be stressful. What a blessing it is to hear the last name given in Isaiah's prophecy! It refers to greater than earthly conditions when we hear the child who is born as

### PRINCE OF PEACE

We hear about his government as he occupies the throne of David. The Lord had promised King David a ruling descendant but one much greater than Solomon or any other succeeding ruler. The special one to come in his family line we heard announced to Mary. Both she and Joseph were descended from the great king of Israel.

The promised one would rule with justice. That is not a fearful prospect, for he brings the verdict of not guilty. He won and announced for us forgiveness of all sins. He rules in righteousness. Not only is there no oppression or injustice in his ways, he achieved righteousness with his perfect life and credits it to us.

This Prince of Peace increases his rule not by warfare but by the peaceful means of the gospel, through the working of the Holy Spirit in winning hearts. His kingdom is established by zeal, shown in his deep love for us and the great cost he paid to make us his own.

Christ's peace is spiritual as he announces, "You are forgiven." Whatever burdens of guilt you carry, confess them and cast them on your Savior Jesus. He has already paid the price for them. The angels announced that peace as we heard them sing over the fields of Bethlehem. Rejoice in the peace of Christmas. Love and trust your Savior.

Christ's peace is for sharing. It will affect your relations with others. When filled with it, can you think evil of another? Share the news of peace. That's how the government of Jesus increases. As the Spirit works faith in other hearts they will have feelings of peace toward you. Reconcile with others if you are at odds with them. Share the peace of forgiveness.

Peace at Christmas is not enough. Each of us will continue to sin. We will wrong others and be wronged by them. Live in contact with the gospel, receive your Savior's peace daily and keep sharing the precious gift of Christmas, your Savior, the Prince of Peace.