

Advent Meditations

on

Isaiah 9:6

Delivered at Washington Community Fellowship

December, 2006

In the Wake of Wonderful
Delivered at Washington Community Fellowship
December 3, 2006

Isaiah 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.

In this information age, we are overwhelmed by advice. Advice is available on almost any subject from friends, from strangers, from the internet, or even from strange friends on the internet.

Golfers give each other advice, almost all of it useless at best. Things like: "Don't think about what you're doing, just get up there and swing at it." Or, "Let your body tell you what to do." If my body knew what to do, I'd be Tiger Woods.

Almost any advice that begins with "Just trust me.." is not to be trusted. And some advice is so dumb it just stops you dead in your tracks. When I was living in Spain a native of Valencia once gave me an insider tip on a great paella restaurant in that city. "They'll treat you better if they think you're a native. So, if you go there, don't use your American accent." Umm... oh, never mind.

People who suffer from migraines are subjected to enough bad advice to give you a headache. Brilliant diagnoses like, "It's all in your head." Or the neurologist who counseled his migraine-plagued patient to quit his job and sell Amway.

But why pay for bad medical advice, when you can get it so much more cheaply from friends and family? Classics like, "Oh, childbirth isn't that painful." Or anything that begins with "You know what they say..."

For that matter, why bother to ask anyone at all, when you can just listen to that benighted little voice inside your own head? You know, the one that says, "Oh, you don't need a plumber. Any idiot can fix that."

Sometimes, when you really do need to ask the experts, they don't agree or can't make up their minds. Harry Truman once complained, "'All my economists say, 'on the one hand... and on the other hand...! Someone give me a one-handed economist!'"

With all this bad advice floating around out there, it kind of makes you perk up when you read a verse like Isaiah 9:6, which predicts the coming of a Messiah who will be called “Wonderful Counselor.” And we begin to think, Wow! I could really use one of those. But in what sense is Christ a Wonderful Counselor? What did Isaiah have in mind?

Our Advent emphasis comes from the four messianic titles found in Isaiah 9:6. We’ll focus on one each week, beginning with “Wonderful Counselor” and then moving on to “Mighty God, Everlasting Father,” and, finally, “Prince of Peace.” Today we want to first say a word about the biblical context in which we find those names. Then we want to think about how Jesus fulfilled this Wonderful Counselor prophecy and what that messianic reality means for us today.

If you step back and take a broad overview of the book of Isaiah, you’ll see that first 39 chapters are mostly doom and gloom, punctuated by a few hopeful passages such as this one. The Israel of David and Solomon had long since been divided into a northern and a southern kingdom, which were known as Israel and Judah. The southern kingdom of Judah had a mixed bag of good and evil rulers. Israel, however, was more consistent. Every last one of its rulers were spiritual losers. Idolatry was rampant. And, so, God removed his blessing from the nation, leaving them vulnerable to an overwhelming external threat.

Chapter 8 of Isaiah ends with a prediction of distress and darkness for Israel. The northernmost provinces of Israel had already been invaded by Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria. Assyria was a fearsome and aggressive empire, and these northern tribes were closest to the Assyrian border.

In Assyria there was no debate about the definition of torture. Torture was what they were going to do to you if you resisted – period. It was state-sponsored terrorism at its very meanest. In a little more than a decade from the time they invaded the north of Israel (733 BC), they controlled the entire country.

As we enter chapter 9, however, verse one ends on a note of hope, that God will one day bless the land he has cursed. Then a poetic prophecy begins in v. 2. As is sometimes the case with prophecy, it is written in the perfect tense, as if it had already happened, even though it was still future. This is partly due to the fact that the seer had already seen it in some sense. But it also emphasizes the certainty of the prophecy. According to this verse a light has dawned (or, in real time, *will dawn*) on this dark region.

In verse six Isaiah describes the source of this light. He will be a child and a son, as viewed from two different perspectives. Messiah will be born a child from the standpoint of people who are alive in the historical moment of his birth. And, as a child born in Israel, they could think of him broadly as a son of the nation or a son of David. But the sonship in view here has a much more far-reaching scope.

Note that this Son is *given*. The Son that was *given* to them, then, was not just one of the many sons of Israel—he was first and foremost the Son of God. “For God so loved the world that he *gave* his one and only Son.”

This title, “Son,” speaks to Christ’s deity, but it’s also refers to his royalty. The king (in this case probably David) was viewed as a son of God. Psalm 2 is a messianic psalm that says in v. 7: “He [that is, the Lord] said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have become your father.’” David’s enthronement and the special relationship he enjoyed with God was a preview of the ultimate ruler—the Messiah, the Son of God.

Continuing on in v. 6, we see that the government will rest upon him. He is not a bureaucrat or a politician or even just a king. Kings needed the help of the military and the priesthood and the prophets. This Messiah will be absolutely sovereign, absolutely capable, and absolutely good. It all rests on him. And verse 7 even informs us that, once established, his reign will be eternal.

Focusing, then, on these names which are so familiar to us in this season of the year, we begin in verse 6 with *Wonderful Counselor*. Let’s think for a moment about this really quite unusual phrase. It appears that the two words are to be understood as a pair, as the NIV translates them. It’s hard to be absolutely certain, however. The King James Version actually places a comma between the words *wonderful* and *counselor*. The phrasing of Handel’s Messiah reflects that same understanding, where the last three names are treated as pairs—mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace—but the first two—wonderful and counselor—are distinct.

To complicate matters the word *wonderful* is not an actually adjective but a noun—literally, *wonder*. And *counselor* is a participle, though I know that’s too much grammatical information for many of us. But in any case, Hebrew doesn’t treat these categories in the same way that English does. The Targum and other ancient Jewish sources understood these names to be four pairs. And the parallelism of *Wonderful Counselor* with the other pairs is also a good reason to think that the two belong together.

Of course, the Messiah would be wonderful apart from his role as Counselor, and the Counselor would certainly be wonderful even if not designated as such. So, either way it doesn’t stand to alter our Christology. Perhaps the deciding factor is that we have only four weeks until Christmas, and if we split up *Wonderful* and *Counselor* it will throw a monkey wrench into our Advent plans.

Before we look at what it means for Christ to be a Wonderful Counselor, let’s first consider what doesn’t mean. Most of the ways we employ the word *counselor* tend to confuse rather than clarify the meaning of this verse.

The Hebrew term itself is typically used to refer to an official advisor, someone who offers expertise to a superior. Therefore, *counselor* here is not just an advocate, in the sense of a lawyer. So, while it is true that Jesus is our advocate before God, that’s not in view here. This counselor does not advocate for someone but to *someone* for *something*.

Nor does it imply that Christ is our counselor in the sense of being a therapist, one who listens and understands and helps us work through our problems. Christ may do that, but this ancient role was much more formal, not some kind of personalized care to someone in need.

We must also resist the temptation to see Jesus as our counselor because he sends the Holy Spirit. When Jesus speaks about his sending the Holy Spirit in John 14-16, the NIV tells us that he will send another “counselor.” Some other versions use the word “comforter.” However we view this counseling or comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit, it is not the fulfillment of this prophecy. *Paraclete*, the Greek word used in the New Testament, was sent from a superior to an inferior to come alongside and help. But not here.

Having said what a counselor is not, where does that leave us? If Christ is not our counselor in the ways we might typically imagine, then just what is a Wonderful Counselor?

I believe the answer is twofold. First, Jesus is a Wonderful Counselor in terms of his own governance. And, second, I believe he plays a special role within the counsel of the very triune Godhead.

What does being a Wonderful Counselor have to do with governance? Though Isaiah’s word for counselor is typically applied in the context of official court advisors, we find that it was occasionally used of the rulers themselves. Micah 4:9 provides an example:

Why do you now cry aloud--
have you no king?
Has your counselor perished,
that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labor?

When you see it in verse form, it’s easier to appreciate the parallelism. In the first and the last lines, “crying aloud” and the “pain of the woman in labor,” both refer to the same painful desperation. But the second and third lines are also synonymous parallels. Having no king and having your counselor perish are referring to the same loss of leadership.

Conclusion? The king can also be referred to as a counselor. The defining quality of a counselor was that of being a very wise person. Here the king, as a wise ruler, gives the benefit of his wisdom to the nation through enlightened leadership.

There is at least one other occasion in which the word *counselor* is used to refer to a ruler. Look at Isaiah 1:26: “I will restore your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as at the beginning.” Literally, these “leaders” are *judges*, and the “rulers” are *counselors*, the same word used in Isaiah 9:6.

The judges that Israel had had in days of old were not like their current magistrates. They were people like Moses and Joshua and Gideon. They were actually leaders or rulers,

which the NIV captures with its translation. And in this construction the term *counselors* is clearly parallel to *judges*, so it seems best to understand them as rulers who will once again lend their wisdom to the direction of the nation.

This ultimate king, the Messiah, has no need of human advisors. That doesn't mean he has no need of wisdom or knowledge. It's just that God is a special case. He has no need of human advisors, because he himself knows what is best. Isaiah 40:13-14: "Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counselor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?"

These are obviously rhetorical questions, to which the answer is—nobody. Because God's wisdom is sufficient. He is his own counselor. Ephesians 1:11 speaks of "the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the *purpose* (or, in some translations, *counsel*) of his will."

God doesn't need to commission a study or take a straw vote or have a cabinet meeting or float a referendum. He can figure it out all by himself. He is a counselor, but to himself on behalf of his kingdom.

So, God has no need of outside counsel. But what about an in-house counselor? What might that mean? Here we get into a somewhat more speculative area. And, yet, I believe that there is Scriptural evidence that Christ makes a special advisory contribution to the deliberations of the Godhead of which he is a part. And this is the second aspect of his role as counselor.

Many of our theological notions about God are based more on Greek philosophy than they are on Scripture. We posit certain *omni* characteristics of God, like omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience. Then we add a healthy dose of immutability and a big, old dollop of infinity, and out pops an unmoved mover who's really quite super but doesn't exactly remind you of Jehovah. For example, some classical theological definitions of God's omniscience say that God has always known everything that is, was, will be, or could be as a simple and eternal attribute of his being. No real process, just an unavoidable, inevitable, intuitive, and exhaustive knowledge.

In the Bible, however, you find him perceiving, reasoning, planning, deliberating, and deciding. We can grant that some of these descriptions are anthropomorphic—that is, they explain God in human terms we can relate to. Those anthropomorphisms are helpful if God's intellectual process is simply different than ours. But if there is no rational process to speak of, then these anthropomorphic descriptions do not help us to understand anything. All they can do is mislead us.

So, I conclude that some kind of deliberation occurs within the Godhead. And Christ, as a result of his human experience, brings a unique perspective. James tells us that God the Father cannot be tempted, but Jesus, as the God-man, could and did experience temptation. And for that reason, the Second Person of the Trinity has been put in charge

of judgment. John 5:22, 27: “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.... And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”

The fact that there is love shared within the Trinity implies a kind of dynamic rather than static relationship, one in which some communication takes place. And we know, according to Romans 8:34, that Jesus is at the right hand of God, interceding for us. So, he is bringing something to the attention of the Father. In fact, the very metaphor of his placement at the Father’s right hand gives him not only a platform for ruling but a kind of advisory position within the Holy Trinity.

So, when the prophet Isaiah refers to the Messiah as a counselor, what he is describing is a rather unique position. Jesus is a counselor in the sense of having the expertise to be a wise ruler of the kingdom the Father has given him. But he is also a counselor in his relationship to the Father within the Trinity—the perfect counselor who has had the experience of living incarnate within his own creation. The baby born in Bethlehem, who began in the humblest of circumstances, has been elevated to the highest possible position as the cosmic counselor. It is, I’ll admit, a mind-bending and mind-boggling concept.

It takes a little work to establish what it means for Christ to be *Counselor*. In contrast, his designation as *Wonderful* is no mystery at all. Lots of praise music talks about just how wonderful he is. “His name is wonderful, his name is wonderful, his name is wonderful, Jesus my Lord.” *What a Wonderful Savior, Wonderful Grace of Jesus, Wonderful, Merciful Savior, Isn’t He Wonderful, Bless that Wonderful Name of Jesus, More than Wonderful.*

Jesus, the Messiah, possesses the qualities that make him wonderful, and everyone from trained theologians to Sunday school youngsters find themselves full of wonder in his presence. And he created this same sensation during his earthly ministry. Mark 9:15: “As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.” On eight different occasions Luke tells us that the crowds of people were “amazed” by Jesus. Christ is the historical figure who has inspired more wonder in more people than any other.

So, we get it. Christ is wonderful. But what, specifically, does it mean that he is a Wonderful *Counselor*? As I mentioned earlier, the word translated *wonderful* actually appears as a noun in the original text. And that makes it all the more striking. It’s like the difference between a wonderful woman and Wonder Woman. A wonderful woman might just be nice, but Wonder Woman has supernatural powers and a star-spangled uniform. The promised Messiah is not just a super-nice guy, he is supernatural as well.

Scripture uses this same term to refer to many of God’s great miracles as *wonders*. So, what Christ brings to his role as counselor is not just a great résumé for wise governance or a superior ability; he brings supernatural power to the job. And it doesn’t stop there. The fact that he is wonderful points to his deity, that Messiah is God himself.

In Judges 13 the Angel of the Lord appears to Manoah and predicts the birth of his son, Samson. In v. 17 Manoah asks the angel, "What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?" Verse 18: He replied, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding." The word translated *beyond understanding* is rendered in other translations as *wonderful*. And this tips us off that this Angel of the Lord is, in fact, divine—a pre-incarnate appearance of the Second Person of the Trinity. So, when this baby born in Bethlehem is called *wonderful*, using the same root word as Judges 13, it doesn't just imply that he is extraordinary; it signals that he is God.

So, we have filtered our initial impressions about what a Wonderful Counselor might or could be through a biblical and theological grid. And we have seen what this designation has to do with Christ's rule and his relationships within the Trinity. But what does it mean for us to live today in the wake of wonderful? How does this truth impact us?

First, it impacts our discipleship. As Jesus' followers, we have acknowledged Christ's Lordship, but we sometimes have a faulty picture of the one we are following. We carry around the image of Jesus and his disciples as a hippie-like band of counter-cultural, anti-establishment spiritual activists alternately confronting and avoiding the authorities. And we just Photoshop our picture into the gang.

Well, following Jesus remains a counter-cultural lifestyle. But there is another, parallel reality at work here. As a ruling Wonderful Counselor, Jesus Christ has already been exalted to God's right hand. He is right now Lord of a vast, eternal kingdom and wields awesome power. He's not just waiting for his moment.

So, we don't follow him just because it's a hip alternative; we follow him because he is the only real spiritual authority and reigns even now as an all-wise counselor, and all-wise ruler. Not only will our loyalty to him shake up the kingdoms of this world, our adherence to his leadership will create the right sort of life here and now, a life lived in a kingdom ruled by God's wisdom.

But there is another way in which I believe we are called to live in the wake of wonderful. If this Wonderful Counselor is good enough for God, then he ought to be more than good enough for me as well.

I'm wearing a new suit today. Well, almost new. Even before we moved to DC, I had struck up a friendship with George de Paris, who was a tailor to every president since Lyndon Johnson. A while back I was visiting him in his shop, and he told me that one of his clients had traded in a couple of almost new, hand-made suits on some brand-new ones. He said, "They'll be big, but I think I can cut them down and make them fit you." So, what did I have to lose? If he's good enough for the President, he's good enough for me.

Jesus is the ultimate adviser in the most powerful inner circle in the universe. And, yet, inexplicably, many of us listen to his advice only when all else fails. Or spend so much time reading and listening to every other expert's advice on everything under the sun that

we find ourselves embarrassingly ignorant of God's revelation through Christ.

Since the very Spirit of Christ lives within us, we have access to the greatest storehouse of wisdom ever. But how are you capitalizing on that opportunity? If he's good enough for God, he ought to be good enough for you and me.

Yes, our relationship with this Wonderful Counselor should affect our lifestyle. But living in the wake of wonderful should also affect our worship. This wonder-counselor puts me in mind of the German *wunder*, as in *wunderkind*, a prodigy. This messianic *wunder*-counselor has no peer; he is one of an amazing kind.

We don't just celebrate his birth to honor him as a great historical figure; we worship him as God. There are any number of great people who get a day named after them. But worship belongs solely to the One who is different not only in degree but in kind, because he is wonderful and even more than wonderful to us.

[Scott singing / To hear Sandi Patty and Lionel Harris reprise their 1984 recording in 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRTwUvZG5a0>] "He's more wonderful than my mind can conceive, he's more wonderful than my heart can believe. He goes beyond my highest hopes and fondest dreams. He's everything that my soul ever longed for, everything he promised and so much more. He's more than amazing, more than marvelous, more than miraculous, could ever be. He's more than wonderful, that's what Jesus is to me."

May we celebrate this Christmas in the wake of wonderful, our Wonderful Counselor.

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Here I Come to Save the Day
Delivered at Washington Community Fellowship
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Isaiah 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.

[Recorded Mighty Mouse Theme <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsPa8QgGGkc>]
“Mister Trouble never hangs around
When he hears this mighty sound:
"Here I come to save the day!"
That means that Mighty Mouse is on the way!

Yes sir, when there is a wrong to right
Mighty Mouse will join the fight
On the sea or on the land
He gets the situation well in hand

So though we are in danger
We never despair
'Cause we know that where there's danger
He is there!
He is there! On the land! On the sea! In the air!

We're not worryin' at all
We're just listenin' for his call:
"Here I come to save the day!"
That means that Mighty Mouse is on the way!"

It's true. When I was a small child my hero was a rodent. Between Mighty Mouse and Mickey Mouse, my world was as mouse-driven as my computer cursor is today. Over the years, however, I've discovered that mice are not as noble as I once imagined. And I've experienced a rather striking transformation from mouse admirer to mouse exterminator.

But I still have kind of a soft spot for Mighty Mouse, because he wasn't just mighty; he was heroic, saving the innocent from the likes of Oil Can Harry and other assorted villains. Which, of course, segues quite naturally into our focus for this second week of Advent 2006. Okay, it may require a little imagination, but hang with me.

Isaiah 9:6 says, “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.” Last week we considered the first of these names, Wonderful Counselor. This week’s focus is the promised Messiah as Mighty God.

Of course, it would be both ludicrous and blasphemous to place the Mighty God on a par with Mighty Mouse. But, like all great art, Mighty Mouse points the way to a greater and more transcendent reality. He is not only mighty but heroic. He delivers the oppressed. He inspires hope in those he protects. And we’re about to see that this is exactly what happens when the Mighty God says, “Here I come to save the day.”

What is Isaiah trying to tell us by saying that this child who will be born, this son who will be given, will be called *Mighty God*? Let’s think first about the startling fact that the Messiah is called *God*.

Old Testament Jews had no concept of the Trinity. There are prophecies that, in retrospect, seem to indicate that Messiah would be divine, but no other passage in the Old Testament states the connection in such bold terms. In Isaiah’s time, before the exile, people simply expected that the Messiah would be a great ruler. It wasn’t until a much later period that they began to expect a superhuman deliverer sent from heaven. But even so, they didn’t equate the Messiah with God, as Jesus’ own experience clearly shows.

The stunning theology of this statement has led to various attempts to explain it away, even by some who accept the deity of Christ. They just don’t see how Isaiah could have figured this out. Some have suggested that the name is simply hyperbolic, perhaps court flattery, which was common in those days. Others see it as depicting a god-like hero.

But these explanations all run headlong into Isaiah’s own use of the term and the facts of Jewish theology. Though ancient Near Eastern kings were often flattered by divine designations, the Jews were much more circumspect about such matters. The metaphysics of the other religions contemplated gods who were more like humans on steroids or comic book heroes. But in Jewish theology God was holy, separate from, and transcendent with respect to his creation. So, divine language was not used loosely with respect to royalty.

The Hebrew for “Mighty God” is *El gibbor*. The word *El* is translated “God.” Though *El* may occasionally occur in Semitic languages in a human context, in Isaiah *El* always refers to God. And the only other occurrence of *El gibbor* in Scripture is also in Isaiah, which gives us more insight into how the prophet uses this name.

Just turn to Isaiah 10:21. There it says that the remnant will return to the *Mighty God*. Clearly, *Mighty God* refers to the same one mentioned at the end of v. 20, *the Holy One of Israel*. Which shows that Isaiah considered *El gibbor* a divine name and would not have used it just one chapter earlier as a way to describe a human subject.

But how could Isaiah have said such a thing more than 700 years before the birth of Christ? The answer probably *is not* that Isaiah understood the Trinity. The answer *is* that it wasn't his idea. 2 Peter 1:21: "For prophecy never had its origin in human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." So, the prophets sometimes said things that not even they did not understand. And that appears to be the case here.

It is significant that Christ is called *Mighty God*, because it underscores the fact that he is, in fact, God in the flesh. But we saw last week how even the name *Wonderful Counselor* supports the deity of Christ, and next week's focus, *Everlasting Father*, certainly does so as well. What gives this name its uniqueness is that the quality of *might* that is attributed to God. So, let's think about that aspect of the name for a bit.

In contrast to *El*, the word *gibbor* is most often used of men. And depending on the context, it is translated in a variety of ways. Just to give you a flavor of this word, let me share a few of the ways it's used.

In Joshua *gibbor* is translated as *fighting men*. The Angel of the Lord calls Gideon *gibbor*, translated *mighty warrior*. In the book of Ruth, Boaz is called a *gibbor*, *a man of standing*. When King Saul is looking for a harpist, one of his servants recommends David, because he is a *gibbor*, *a brave man*. Later, when David cuts off Goliath's head, the Philistines saw that their *gibbor*, their *hero* was dead. In Nehemiah they are called *able men*. In Ezra a *powerful official*. And in Psalm 19:5 a *gibbor* is a *champion athlete*, who rejoices to run his course.

The most common translation for *gibbor* is *warrior* or *hero*, but, as you can see from the examples, it usually has to do with the sense of applied might or capability. Its not just strength for the sake of strength, like some of today's musclepersons. They spend hours in the weight room to achieve a certain look, but not because of any practical need for such a physique. They're not doing laundry on their washboard abs. You don't need Popeye-like forearms to drive a car or do data entry. They just preen in front of the mirror at the gym or pose on the cover of fitness magazines, flexing their aesthetic muscle.

I think that's the way a lot of people see God—kind of an infinite mass of decorative muscle. We praise him for being mighty, even though we're not quite sure what he does with all that power. Something spiritual probably. We just think it's cool to be on a team whose captain is kind of buff.

Ask any believer if God is mighty. I don't think you'll get any naysayers. Then ask what he's done for them lately that required such supernatural strength, and you're likely to get a lot of "Well, uh..."

God's might is not just for show. He is mighty in terms of his heroic capability. He is a deliverer who comes to fight for you when you cannot manage alone. Someone who can boldly proclaim, "Here I come to save the day."

This is the God of the Bible, and the pages of Scripture are filled with stories of his mighty acts. Remember his heroic rescue in the Exodus, when God saved his people against seemingly insurmountable odds?

When God first called Moses in Exodus 3:19, he warned him that this was a God-sized job. “But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a *mighty hand* compels him.”

If you remember, however, the plan doesn’t seem to be working too well at first. In fact, things appear to be getting worse rather than better.

This prompts Moses to come back to God in Exodus 5:22: “Moses returned to the LORD and said, ‘O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? ²³Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.’”

To which God responds in Exodus 6:1: “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my *mighty hand* he will let them go; because of my *mighty hand* he will drive them out of his country... (Exodus 6:6) I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with *mighty acts* of judgment.” And he did.

Oh, there were plenty more complications to come. Finally, Pharaoh’s army had the Israelites pinned between the devil and the deep Red Sea. And just when it looks like they’re toast, they hear a voice from heaven, saying, “Here I come to save the day!” (I paraphrased that part a little bit.) Then the waters parted, and the Israelites walked to safety on dry ground.

We don’t serve some preening super-duper deity who sits off in space admiring his biceps. We serve a mighty Savior, a hero who comes to save the day. The whole point of theological might is to be stronger than something else. Otherwise that strength is pretty meaningless to those in need. And our Savior is stronger than at least four types of challenges we face.

Our Savior is stronger than threats. Threats are those situations that hold the potential to ruin what we are or what we want to be. Threats are those situations that hold the potential for keeping us from doing what we want to do.

The classic situational analysis is the SWOT analysis. SWOT—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. When sickness threatens your health, when disagreements threaten your relationships, when setbacks threaten your dreams—that’s when it matters that your Savior is stronger than something else.

Our Savior is also stronger than the unknown. Many of us are fearful, even if we’re not sure just what we’re afraid of. We’re afraid of what might happen if we take a risk, if unforeseen trouble comes our way, if we do something when we shouldn’t or don’t do

something when we should. But whatever that fill-in-the-blank factor may be, your Savior is stronger.

“Yeah, but what if that threat is X,Y, or Z?!!!” It doesn’t matter if it’s ABC, XYZ, or LMNOP. Ephesians 1:19 promises “his incomparably great power for us who believe.” And if it’s *incomparably* great power, then by definition it doesn’t matter what you *compare* it to. Your Savior is stronger.

Our Savior is also stronger than people. Ever notice how many of your problems are caused by people? People who use you, people who abuse you, people who ignore you, people who don’t keep their promises when you wish they had, people who do keep their promises when you wish they hadn’t. And those closest to you can hurt you the most, because rejection really matters when it comes from people we care about.

This Mighty God, as the verse goes on to say, is also the Prince of Peace. He is the ultimate reconciler of people to God and people to one another. And for those who resist his grace, for those who persist in their mistreatment of God’s own, there will be a day of reckoning. One way or another, your Savior takes care of people problems.

Your Savior is also stronger than the supernatural. Now, I’m not one of those people who see demons behind every tree, but Scripture is clear that ultimately our battle is ultimately not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers. Your constant failings, the resistance that you find to your prayers, and even the lack of justice in the world are all energized by supernatural evil.

Cindi is taking a class this fall on *Understanding Islam*. One of the speakers was commenting on how difficult it was to convince Muslims about Christian doctrine. But, he added, Islamic popular religion is often laced with jinns and oppressive spirits who are a great source of trouble. And their faith reportedly has little impact, little power, over such spirits. So, some have turned to Christ as Savior, simply because they’re looking for something stronger than the supernatural.

Might matters. In a world in which God’s people are opposed and oppressed, in a life that will inevitably have its share of disasters and disappointments, we need someone on whom we can call. Someone who will say, “Here I come to save the day,” someone who is stronger than our difficulties, and someone who cares enough to get involved. And that someone is the Mighty God. Moving the Apostle Paul to say, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

All of which I find enormously encouraging until I think about the fact that it’s just not that simple. Let’s be honest; it doesn’t always work out in such a clean, melodramatic fashion. Sometimes we call and call and call, but there is no voice from the sky, nor does anyone come to our rescue. So, how do we reconcile that reality with a Savior who is the Mighty God?

Even though life continues to be full of unresolved challenges, might still matters. Because if God were incapable of resolving our situations, then when trouble came, we would just be on our own. And the reason for our unresolved issues would be obvious.

But if, at any moment he can say, “Here I come to save the day,” and instantaneously vanquish any and all problems, then when troubles linger we understand that there must be another reason other than God’s impotence. Isaiah 50:2 says, “Was my arm too short to deliver you? Do I lack the strength to rescue you? By a mere rebuke I dry up the sea, I turn rivers into a desert.”

So, if trouble persists in spite of a mighty and interested God, why could that be? It’s important to recognize that though God’s might is used on our behalf, our well-being is both an end in itself as well as a means to a greater end. God delights in rescuing his children, but the ultimate objective of God’s might is his own glory and not our comfort.

Theoretically, that is also our order of priorities, at least when we’re not suffering. But remember the Exodus, the quintessential “Here I come to save the day” rescue of all time. Sure, God showed up and showed out in spectacular fashion, but that was after centuries of servitude. That was after miraculous plagues that didn’t do the trick. That was after aborted exits from Egypt. That was after what looked like the ultimate letdown, when after finally leaving the land, Pharaoh’s army pursued them. That was after they had concluded that they would have been better off as slaves.

We see the happy ending, but we easily forget the angst that led up to it. There was a day to save, but only because the situation had become so dire in the first place. Why did God wait so long to do something?

God is not a machine. Machines can be powerful, but they lack discretion. Machines cannot refuse to use their power as they are programmed. They have no sense of the higher good, no sense of timing.

Don’t believe me? Fill up your blender with grape juice. Right up to the brim. Now, make sure the lid is off, and push the maximum speed button. Is this a good idea? No. Will the blender figure that out? No. You’re going to have quite a mess on your hands, not because the blender has no power, but precisely because your blender has stupid power—and your blender apparently has an owner who contributes very little to the intellectual mix.

God is not a machine. He intervenes when he does and in the way he does according to his purposes. As we said, the ultimate purpose is his own glory, and we may or may not see what God sees in that regard. But the mere fact that God possesses the power does not, in itself, compel him to act.

Keep in mind that God deals with many situations providentially rather than miraculously. For instance, most of the time when we get sick, God heals us through the

natural healing processes he has created. So, the fact that you're ill for a week or two does not mean that God doesn't care or that he is not working it out through other means.

Since God is mighty, he could have prevented the trouble we are facing in the first place. His might means that there is a reason for our trials. So, then, why is life annoying? And hard?

The most fundamental reason is that we live in a fallen world, and until we reach God's eternal kingdom, suffering is the rule and not the exception. Some of us don't quite get that. We think that every time something goes wrong God must be picking on us. Ever think that up until that time maybe you might just have been living on a cloud of blessing?

But why do we suffer the way we do, and for the time we do? And why does God sometimes intervene marvelously the way he does? Long-term trouble has a way of drawing us to God that a quick fix does not. Waiting builds faith and dependence. Summoning God like a genie from a bottle puts us in charge, but protracted problems pull us into a partnership with God. They force us not just to pray but to keep on praying. They force us to submit ourselves to God's timing and to whatever will ultimately bring him the greatest glory. They force us to rejoice in tribulation and not just in spite of it.

John 16:33 tells us, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Now, when Jesus said this the work was not yet done. He's speaking prophetically about the ultimate result of his work. After all, he was about to be tortured and crucified.

But notice that Jesus does not say, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I'm going to make all those troubles go away." The promise is that God is about dismantling the spiritual reality that is behind our troubles. And along the way he will resolve many of our troubles, too, in a way that points to his ultimate victory.

Just because God intervenes, that doesn't mean we won't have troubles. It only means we won't have that particular trouble for a while. Because God's rescue stands out by virtue of being the exception. The rule still remains that in this world we will have trouble. Get over it! Praise God when he does save the day, and rejoice that it is evidence that he is saving our forever as well. Because, as the Mighty God, he will indeed overcome the world.

When I was twenty-one I did a one-year pastoral internship. And one of the experiences I had was to start a bus route and bring children to church. Which also meant I had to learn to drive a bus. I had one lesson of about fifteen minutes and was proclaimed road-ready—by someone who clearly didn't have the gift of teaching.

The next day they asked me to drive a bus full of people to a Cincinnati Reds baseball game, and they sweetened the pot with a free ticket. Since I was making all of \$77 a week

in this full-time internship, free plus anything sounded good. So, summoning all my extensive training, I accepted.

It was a drive of about an hour and a half, the final portion of which required that I pilot this wide-bodied behemoth through downtown traffic at rush hour, negotiate my way through the thousands of vehicles headed to the game, drop off the passengers, and find somewhere to park the bus. Fortunately, nobody died.

I did notice, however, that driving a bus, even if you don't know what you're doing, you have one big advantage. And that big advantage is—you're driving a bus, and buses are big. When you turn on your turn signal, people might say, "Now what's this idiot going to do?" But when you start to do it, guess what? They get out of the way.

The reason is simple. If you're in a car and you collide with a bus, you lose. You may have the right of way. Doesn't matter. You still lose. Might matters. When God says, "Here I come to save the day!" there's nothing that's going to stand in his way. Because he's driving the bus.

We started out today with the Mighty Mouse theme song. Overwhelmed as I'm sure you were with the pure production value of that presentation, you might not have been focusing on the lyrics. But, for a cartoon, the words contain some better than average theology if applied to the Mighty God.

"So, though we are in danger
We never despair
'Cause we know that where there's danger he is there!
He is there! On the land! On the sea! In the air!

We're not worryin' at all
We're just listenin' for his call:
"Here I come to save the day!"
That means the Mighty God is on the way!

The Jesus who was born into our world to fulfill Isaiah's promise of a Mighty God is not just a guy who almost made it big but ended up on a cross. He is God who came to redeem and to rescue. And he is mighty, stronger than any challenge we can face. But he is also wise. His might is directed toward the accomplishment of his purposes. And even though his purposes may sometimes be mysterious, the Mighty God remains our refuge, our source of strength, our way when there is no way.

"So though we are in danger, we never despair. 'Cause we know that where there's danger, he is there." Anywhere, anytime, any difficulty. I trust that you're "not worryin' at all." That you're "just listenin' for his call. 'Here I come to save the day.'"

What's in a Name?

Delivered at Washington Community Fellowship
December 17, 2006

Isaiah 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.

We're experiencing a baby boom here at Washington Community Fellowship. And for many of these families it is their first child, which makes it a particularly exciting adventure. One of the fun parts about expecting a new addition is choosing a name. Depending on your culture and your personal preferences, your criteria can vary quite a bit. Some people try to reuse names from within their own family line. Some look for trendy-sounding monikers. Some want their child to have a popular name. Others opt for unique. Still others fabricate a name out of almost any combination of pleasant-sounding syllables.

In many cultures names are not just proper nouns but words that have a meaning in everyday vocabulary. I recently visited the American Indian Museum and saw a wide variety of names employed by Indigenous American tribes. Many of these names are linked to the animal world, and they are quite evocative. They make you stop and think.

Take the Cheyenne name, *Leaning Bear*. That's not like *Bob*. Nothing against *Bob*, but *Bob* doesn't evoke curiosity. Nobody wants to know why *Bob* is *Bob*. But I sure would like to know why that bear is leaning.

I don't know if every tribe names their children at birth or if some take a wait-and-see attitude. Otherwise, how do you come up with *Demothi*, which means *Talks While Walking*; or the Crow name, *Sour Stomach*; or the ever-popular *Inteus*, meaning *Has No Shame*.

Some names sound like they're the result of a family that couldn't agree, like *Awan*, which means *Somebody*. And it takes some pretty abstract parents to go with a name like *Cocheta*, which translates as *That Which You Cannot Imagine*.

Often tribal names are based on the circumstances of the child's birth. *Mitena* is an Omaha name meaning *Born at the New Moon*. And *Maralah* signifies *Born During an Earthquake*. That's got to be pretty rare. If we were to name our children after the circumstances of their birth most of them would be called *Enormous Bill at Hospital*.

Hebrew names, as well, carry very specific meanings. *Abraham* is *father of many*. *Isaiah* means *Yahweh is salvation*. *Ephraim* means *fruitful*. So, when the prophet Isaiah gives names to the Messiah, we ought to take note. The prophet does not say, “And his name shall be called Joe Jr., for his supposed father’s name was Joseph.” Nor does Isaiah say, “And he shall be called Flavian, for it just sounds cool.”

The messianic names of Isaiah 9:6 are, in fact, quite unique. They were not shared by anyone else in the Bible. And of the four, only one is repeated elsewhere in Scripture, and that is in the very next chapter of Isaiah. We’ve already seen how these names reflect the deity of Christ, but perhaps none more so than today’s focus, *Everlasting Father*. After all, identifying the *Son* with the *Everlasting Father* in the same verse doesn’t leave much wiggle room. (Isaiah 9:6)

And, yet, when I actually stop to consider this name, two very important questions come to my mind, and perhaps to yours as well. And those are the questions we will try to answer this morning. First, how can the child who will be born and the son who will be given be at one and the same time the Father? Doesn’t that make the connection a little *too* close, kind of confusing the two persons of the Trinity? And the second question is this: how does it change your world and mine to have a Savior who is called *Everlasting Father*?

Let’s see if we can shed some light on this relationship between Father and the Son. We indicated in the first sermon in this advent series that the son who is given in Isaiah 9:6 is not just a son of the nation, but the Son of God, *given* in the John 3:16 sense. And the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that Christ was the Son of God. And, yet, the prophecy turns around and calls him the Father. So, how can he be both Father and Son?

On the face of it, it does sound a little confusing, kind of like that old song, *I’m My Own Grandpa*. You’ve heard that one, haven’t you?

[Ray Stevens sings this song at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYlJH81dSiw>]

“Now many, many years ago when I was twenty-three
I was married to a widow who was pretty as can be
This widow had a grown-up daughter who had hair of red
My father fell in love with her, and soon they too were wed.

This made my dad my son-in-law and changed my very life
My daughter was my mother, 'cause she was my father's wife
To complicate the matter, even though it brought me joy
I soon became the father of a bouncing baby boy.

My little baby then became a brother-in-law to Dad
And so became my uncle, though it made me very sad
For if he was my uncle, then that also made him brother
Of the widow's grown-up daughter who was also my stepmother.

Father's wife then had a son, who kept them on the run
 And he became my grandchild, for he was my daughter's son
 My wife is now my mother's mother, and it makes me blue
 Because altho' she is my wife, she's my grandmother too.

Now if my wife is my grandmother, then I am her grandchild
 And every time I think of it, it nearly drives me wild
 For now I have become the strangest case I ever saw
 As husband of my grandmother, I am my own grandpa.

No, this Father-Son conundrum is not one of those kinds of deals. It's not an inter-generational mix-up. It's not a semantic trick. It's what we know as the Trinity—which is a thing theologians say, as if that explains it.

The Trinity is a hard concept to get our minds around, because we don't have any satisfactory analogy. In our experience one person equals one being. So, it's hard to conceive of a being comprised of more than one person.

Biblical revelation started out with the oneness of God. One being, whom people naturally assumed was one person as well. In passages like this we have hints of plurality, but it's not until the New Testament, with the coming of Christ and the Spirit, that we have enough information to update what we know about the nature of God.

Here are the facts. When Jesus, the Messiah comes, he makes claims to deity and demonstrates his supernatural character and accepts worship. And then he sends the Spirit, who also has divine qualities and is worshiped along with the Father and the Son. These phenomena require an explanation.

The Old Testament is very clear that the one God is the only one worthy of worship. So, either these additional persons are impostors or multiple manifestations of the same Divine person or only quasi-divine—or there must be some sense in which God is both one and three at the same time—a Trinity or a *Triunity* if you will.

Jesus proved by his power, his message, and his devotion to the Father that he was not an impostor. These three could not be the same Divine person, simply appearing in different forms at different times, because they interact with one another at the same time and place. In fact, at the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:16, Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove, and the Father said how happy he was with his Son. All at once.

It's true that there exists a functional subordination of the Son to Father, but that should not be interpreted as an essential inequality. It does not mean that the Son is less divine or that he is an inferior being, just as your child's functional subordination to you does not make them an inferior being. Rather, the notion of sonship is meant to convey an essential equality. In Scripture we see the Father treating the Son as divine and promoting

his worship, something that would, of course, contradict a fundamental principle of the Old Testament—unless the two persons actually belong to the same being.

In the early centuries of the Church there were multiple alternative explanations floating around that sought to resolve this tension. But, in the end, all of them were deemed heretical, because they solved the mystery by slighting either the three-ness or the oneness. Of course, that was not the end of inadequate explanations, but subsequent attempts have been little more than a re-packaging of the same old errors.

I think it's safe to say that the Trinity is a not a doctrine that the Church came up with to make Christianity more transparent to its members or to make it more palatable to the unevangelized. It is not an intuitive solution; it is not the mind's first refuge. It flies in the face of the KISS principle, Keep It Simple Stupid. It is rather, the very set of Scriptural statements about Father, Son, and Spirit that have driven Christians throughout the centuries to embrace this mysterious doctrine, in spite of its intellectual awkwardness. And that, in itself, constitutes *prima facie* evidence that this is the correct solution.

It's important to have some sense of this Trinitarian context before tackling Isaiah 9:6. But we still have to sort out the relationships in this verse, because even if there are three in one, that still doesn't explain why the Son is called "Everlasting Father."

Equality is one thing; equivalence is another. Yes, the language of Isaiah's prophecy underscores the equality of Father and Son. But, no, it is not trying to fuse or conflate the Father and Son by saying that they are one in the same. Even if that had been his intent, prophetic language does not lend itself to such precision. This kind of poetry, given in verse form, is better at generating images and impressions than it is at dissecting theological nuances.

It's interesting to note that Isaiah doesn't say that the Son will *be* the Father; he says that this Son "will be called" the Everlasting Father—just as he will be called each of the other three names that appear in this verse. There's no evidence, however, that Jesus actually was or will be "called" any of these names, in the sense of a proper name—least of all, *Everlasting Father*, a name more naturally associated with a different person of the Trinity.

So, what is Isaiah trying to tell us? As we have seen, biblical names are more than handles; they are descriptive. The point of the prophetic name here is not what people will actually say when they address him, but what he is like.

If you get a promotion and somebody tells you that they are going to start calling you *The Big Kahuna*, it doesn't mean that anyone will ever take you for an actual Hawaiian high priest (which is what the term means) or that anybody will ever say, "Hey, Kahuna! Yeah, you, the big one..." The name is a title designed to say something about you.

In order to better understand the relationship between Father and Son, we have to look to the New Testament, where it is fleshed out. There is a hidden, holy aspect of God that is mysterious and beyond direct human perception. This is the aspect of the Godhead

represented by the Father. John 1:18 says: “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”

How can this verse say that no one has ever seen God and then turn around and talk about the Son being God and also being known? Because in the first case the reference to God is a reference to the Father. The Son, however, is also God, as the verse clearly says. Therefore, he knows the Father perfectly and is able to make him known.

Sonship implies equality, because a Son must be the same kind of being as his Father. This was patently obvious to the Jews. John 5:18: “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him... he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

But Jesus clarified that he was not just a separate but equal God, when in John 10:30 he claims, “I and the Father are one.” Which doesn’t mean that they are identical. In that case it would be quite odd for Christ to speak about the Father in the third person and to converse with the Father in the second person.

So, using the New Testament to interpret the Old, we discover the full meaning of Isaiah’s prophecy: that God the Father and God the Son pertain to the same Divine being and essence, and though the Son is a distinct person with a particular role, he is everything the Father is, including everlasting.

Of course, Isaiah did not understand the full import of what he was saying. Nor could Mary and Joseph have grasped that the helpless child born on that first Christmas was called the Everlasting Father. As the song asks:

“Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb?
The sleeping child you're holding is the great I Am!

On that night so long ago, when God himself became part of the human race, both history and eternity were changed forever. But, more specifically, what does it mean to us today, as followers of Jesus, that he is called *the Everlasting Father*?

Let’s first see how the Christ of Christmas functions in a fatherly way, and then we’ll see how his eternal nature makes that even more special. God’s fatherhood interfaces with us in at least three ways – as progenitor, as protector, and as provider.

Fathers are progenitors, creating offspring. Human fathers are procreators, whereas God is the Creator. And we are indebted to him for life itself. Dt. 32:6, the song of Moses says:

“Is this the way you repay the LORD,
you foolish and unwise people?”

Is he not your Father, your Creator,
who made you and formed you?"

The gospel of John tells us that the Son, too, was involved in creation. In John 1:2-3 we read: He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

The Song of Moses makes it abundantly clear that there is a right way and a wrong way to respond to one's Creator. Because Christ has given us life, both physical and spiritual, we must recognize our dependence on him. And we must respond in obedience and thanksgiving.

Unfortunately, dependence is not our strong suit in this individualistic America, known for its Declaration of *Independence*. Standing up for myself, protecting my rights, doing it my way – that's what our society values. Which makes us prefer a God who can help us get what we want, rather than one to whom we are beholden.

At some point almost every preschooler decides that they are quite grown up enough to strike out on their own without mom and dad. Our daughter got in the car, with the keys, and announced that she was going to drive herself to the candy store— at age two! Of course, we just laughed, because she couldn't even reach the pedals. In contrast, our presumptuous independence against God is not quite so funny, because we can reach the pedals—and get ourselves in as much trouble as a kid driving a car.

As father, God is also our protector. Most of us fear something, something we don't want to face alone. When we were children, we sometimes hid under the covers from the imagined terrors of night. Until dad showed up and the fears magically disappeared— because then we had someone (who at least seemed) all powerful on our side.

Listen to Zechariah 2:8 says that "whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye," and assures us that God will take care of those people. To paraphrase Jim Croce's rule of thumb: "You don't tug on Superman's cape, you don't spit into the wind, you don't pull the mask off of the Lone Ranger, and you don't mess with God's elect." Yeah, I know it doesn't exactly rhyme, but it's true. Our father is our protector.

Not only is heavenly Father our progenitor and protector, he is also our provider. Psalm 68:5 calls him "a father to the fatherless." Whatever the lack, whatever the need God is our provider for us. Jesus reminds us that our Father in Heaven knows our need and faithfully provides. But if Christ himself is also called the *Everlasting Father*, then we understand that God will indeed meet all our needs "according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus," as the Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians. The one who multiplied the loaves and fishes can fix your bank account, he can shoulder your debt, he can supply your retirement—if you will simply trust him and follow his leadership.

Fathers are progenitors, they are protectors, and they are providers. That can be true of both human fathers as well as our heavenly father. But when the prophet describes the

coming Messiah as *Everlasting* Father, all of a sudden he places God's fatherhood beyond the scope of human capacity.

Every father wants to be there for his children. I interrupt staff meetings and counseling sessions and just about any kind of activity, when I see my daughter's number come up on my cell phone. Sometimes I have to just say I'll call her back, but I want her to know that I am there for her, and I want her to feel free to call me.

We all want our children to think that we'll always be there for them, but the fact is that we won't. Because we can't. Many of you have lost parents in recent months, and you know that all too well. There is only one everlasting father.

I have known three of my great grandfathers. They're all gone. I had a very close relationship with one of my grandfathers. He died a few years ago. When I was little, I just took my dad for granted, as if he'd always be there. I'm so happy when I get to see him these days, and all the more so because those opportunities are finite. They always were, but we just sort of become more aware as we get older. I thank God for a father who not only loved and cared for me but pointed me to the Everlasting Father, for that is the greatest and most permanent parental legacy of all.

Acting as the Everlasting Father, Jesus Christ gives us not only temporal but eternal life. In John 10:28, in the same passage in which he claims oneness with the Father, he says: "I give them [my sheep, my followers] eternal life, and they shall never perish." If he weren't everlasting himself, he couldn't offer an everlasting relationship.

The Everlasting Father does not change with age. You know, as we get older we at some point realize that we are no longer "with it." And then a few more years go by, and we don't even care. But our Everlasting Father does not go from vigorous to feeble, nor from inexperienced to wise. He never gets out of synch with succeeding generations. His guidance is just as relevant today as it was when he called Abram from Ur of the Chaldees.

Finally, the Everlasting Father has an eternal perspective. He takes the long view of our growth. He doesn't give up on us just because we're going through a bad stretch. According to Philippians 1:6 he is committed to completing what he started in us.

Every parent can look back and wish they had a few do-overs. "If only I'd known then what I know now." But the Everlasting Father is never short-sighted. But My perspective is bound by my own finitude. But God never wises up too late. He is the Everlasting Father.

What's in a name? Quite a bit, as it turns out. *The Everlasting Father*, Isaiah calls him. A surprising name to apply to a tiny baby born in a stable to be raised by pre-modern parents in an era of fear and injustice and spiritual corruption.

What's in a name? A father—a progenitor, a protector, and a provider. But, except for the fact of physical life, this fatherhood is not a relationship that our Savior forces upon us. Rather, it is one that he invites us into. He offers us eternal life. He offers us protection. He offers us provision. If we will simply let him be our father. Have you discovered the joy of dependence on an all-wise and all-powerful father? Or are you stubbornly insisting on making your own way?

What's in a name? Think just a moment about the word *everlasting*. In Washington, DC even short-term associations can be hard to find. Employment opportunities in this global market fracture relationships. An unkind word can end a friendship. A tragic moment can take away a loved one. But Christ, who is himself eternal, offers you eternal life, an unending relationship with him. If you have never accepted that offer, you should do so today.

Jesus offers you his eternal perspective, a wisdom that goes far beyond your own to light life's dark way. And though your appreciation of him will grow as you mature, he will ever remain an unchanging father figure on whom you can always rely.

What's in a name? Quite a lot, and some of it surprising. A name like Everlasting Father that points, not to some kindly codger blissfully chilling in his eternal now, but to a dynamic God-man who entered our world under the most upside-down of circumstances, who feels our hurts, who meets our needs, and whose fondest, forever desire is to be in relationship with a finite, ungrateful, and stubborn soul like me and like you. And he proved it, by becoming one of us, by being rebuffed and rejected by those he came to save, and, finally, by taking his love all the way to the cross.

And now, like the father of the prodigal son, this Everlasting Father waits to welcome his wandering children. If you have strayed from him today, won't you lay aside your pride, receive his grace, and come home?