

CHRISTMAS SURPRISES: PROMISES OF THE CHILD-KING (Isaiah 9:1-7)

Do you like surprises? What do you think of surprise gifts, surprise parties, a surprise visit from a loved one? I think those things are wonderful.

There are, however, some surprises that aren't exactly welcome: a surprise repair bill, a surprise audit from the IRS, a surprise finding by the doctor.

For good or bad, surprises are a way of life because none of us knows what a day will bring. People can make guesses, make predictions, make wishes, but in the end, there are few things we can cause to happen and many things we can't keep from happening. Life is a surprise. Do you remember what Forest Gump learned from his mama? "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get."

Few things are as fertile for surprises as Christmas. At work, you might have a secret Santa. You go to your mailbox, and you pull out a Christmas card from someone you haven't heard from in years. You look under your Christmas tree, and you find a present with your name on it, but you have no earthly idea what is in that box. It's a surprise.

There were quite a few surprises that very, first Christmas:

- Mary was surprised by the appearance of an angel and the message that angel delivered.
- Joseph was quite surprised that Mary was expecting because he knew that child couldn't be his.
- The shepherds keeping watch over their flocks were surprised when a host of angels appeared with a very strange announcement.
- Watchers of the night sky were surprised by the appearance of a new star.
- Herod and all those living in Jerusalem were surprised when Magi from the East showed up asking questions.

It is not uncommon for new parents to send out a birth announcement soon after their baby boy or baby girl comes into the world. God did something different. He sent out a birth announcement more than 700 years before Jesus came into the world. It is found in Isaiah 9.

Between now and the New Year, we are going to be looking at Christmas Surprises, at the surprising things that attended Jesus' birth. We start with the promises of the Child-King as told in the first seven verses of Isaiah 9.

Not too unlike us, Isaiah lived in a tempestuous time. Under the reign of Tiglath Pileser, Assyria came to life, and began gobbling up neighboring lands and people. Northern Israel was not left untouched. It fell in 722 B.C. Isaiah lived in the south, but he saw what was happening, and he foresaw what would happen to his own people in time if they did not repent. He prophesied their destruction. It came at the hands of the Babylonians 100 years after Isaiah was gone.

Judgment was not the only thing Isaiah foresaw. Isaiah wrote of a Child who would

come, and when that Child arrived, He would shine a light upon those living in darkness. He would bring joy where there had been mourning. He would bring peace where there had been war. But this Child was far more than a Child. He was a King. He would occupy a throne, and both His Kingdom and reign would never end.

As we investigate what Isaiah promised, we will learn five specific things about Our Child-King.

Our Child-King is a Light Giver

The very lands that Isaiah specified: the land of Zebulun, Naphtali, the way of the sea (which was an ancient trade route running north to south connecting Syria and Egypt), and the Galilee, all of these were the very places where Jesus spent the bulk of His ministry. Matthew picks up on that fact and references what Isaiah wrote as he describes the ministry of Jesus. Look at Matthew 4:12-17.

For the most part, Jesus' ministry was to the down and out, not the up and in. It was directed to the beleaguered people, not the beautiful people. It was to those in darkness that Jesus came giving light—the light of truth and the light that brings life. That is why John was able to write in the first chapter of His gospel, “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:9).

In Isaiah 49:6, the prophet made it clear that this light would come in the form of a person. He wrote: “It is too small a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel.” Surely, that would be a great thing to redeem the people of Israel, but God says that would be too small of a thing. He continued, “I will make you a light for the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

This year, every year, we give specifically to world missions. We participate in the shining of the light of Jesus through this world because Jesus and the message of Jesus is a light for the nations, all the nations of the world.

To understand what it means that Jesus is a light, we have to consider the opposite. To live in darkness means to have an absence of understanding. Just as physical darkness refers to an absence of light, spiritual darkness is caused by an absence of truth. Jesus is the truth, and so when you have Him, He takes away your darkness and gives you spiritual understand-ing. According to Peter, as Christians, we have been called out of darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

Paul wrote of those who have not yet trusted Christ. He says, “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts” (Ephesians 4:18).

The worst kind of blindness is willful blindness. The Greek philosopher Plato wrote, “We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark. The real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.”

Jesus came so that we could know the truth: the truth about God, the truth about ourselves, the truth about eternity, and the truth about what really matters in life.

In July of the year 1054 (966 years ago), something spectacular happened. A new star

appeared. In appearance, this new star was said to be larger than a full moon. It was so enormous and so bright that it could be seen clearly in the daytime. It was seen for 23 consecutive days in the daytime, and could be seen for a little less than two years in the night-time until it finally disappeared.

Both Japanese and Chinese astronomers reported seeing this star. It was recorded in Arabia, Alaska, the South Pacific, and even by the Anastasi Indians of the Southwest.

What did they see? It was a supernova. A star that was 6,000 light years from earth exploded, and the people living in 1054 A.D. saw it. They witnessed that amazing sight.

The interesting thing is that no one from Europe recorded the sighting. From London to Leningrad, from England to the Black Sea, there was only silence. Historians and archeologists have not found a single parchment or manuscript that suggests the people of Europe even took note of the spectacular event in the heavens.

The year was 1054 A.D. We call that period of history the Dark Ages. One man wrote, "An age deserves the title *Dark*, not because the light is not there, but because the people are so preoccupied, they never notice the light that is given."

Two-thousand years ago, a man appeared who said of Himself, "I am the light of the world." He gave His light to the people living in that day, and He is still shining His light to the people of our day.

Unfortunately, millions of people are living in darkness, not because the light is not shining but because they are too preoccupied with the things of this world to notice.

Have you seen His light? Have you received the Light Giver?

Our Child-King Is a Burden-Bearer

Look again at v. 6. The text says, "To us a child is born, to us a son is given." Let me add one little three-letter word to that sentence: the word that is spelled b-u-t. "To us a child is born, [but] to us a son is given. There is a huge difference between a child being born and a son being given. Mary was able to give birth to a child, but only God could give a son. Through a miraculous event, God fertilized and implanted an egg into the womb of Mary. That fertilized egg grew and grew, and about nine months later, Mary went into labor, and she bore a child, a baby boy. But this Son was God's Son, and willingly, and lovingly, and graciously, and sacrificially, God and only God was able to give this Son to a sinful and needy world. "For God so loved the world that He gave (not Mary, but God), . . . He gave His only begotten Son . . ."

In His humanity, Jesus was a child that was born, but in His deity, He was a Son that was given.

According to Isaiah, this Child would grow up to bear a burden, the burden of government, the burden of reigning and ruling over His Kingdom, a Kingdom that is ever expanding.

Have you ever seen photographs of when a US President takes office, and when he leaves his office either four or eight years later? The difference is startling. The hair is grayer, the brow more furrowed, the shoulders more stooped.

The weight of governing this country must be immense, and it most certainly takes an

emotional and physical toll upon the one who occupies the chair behind the desk in the oval office.

Some years ago, Tomas Tewell was the pastor of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. In a message entitled, “The Weight of the World,” he said:

Go out the doors of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church this morning. Go five blocks down the street, and in front of the International Building at 630 Fifth Avenue, you will see a beautiful, large statue of Atlas, the strongest man in all the world.

As you look at that statue, notice that Atlas is a handsomely proportioned man with enormous shoulders, rippling muscles, bulging thighs. But he is weighted down, for he is bearing the entire weight of all the world on his shoulders . . .”

Tewell added, “Unless I miss my guess, there’s someone in the sanctuary this morning who feels that you have the entire weight of the world on your shoulders.”

Are you that person? Are you bearing the weight of caring for an aging loved one—a parent, a spouse, a sibling, a friend? Are you the primary bread winner in your family, and you are feeling the weight of making ends meet and trying to keep the money from running out before the month does, and the race between the two happens every month, month after month? You are getting weary trying to hold it all up and keep it all together—your family, your marriage, your finances, your job, your sanity.

Later in his message, Tewell said:

If you cross the street from 630 Fifth Avenue, the International Building where Atlas is, you’ll go right in the front door of St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

Go down there on the left-hand side, and almost all the way up by the altar on the left-hand side you will see a statue of Joseph holding the baby Jesus. Jesus’ arms are outstretched, and he’s got a smile on His face as radiant as the sun. As I look at Jesus the baby with His arms outstretched, it’s almost as if He’s got the whole world right in His hands, and it’s light.

I often go by those two statues. And when I go by, I ask myself a question: “Is the government of my life on my shoulders or on Christ’s?”

Jesus wants to, and He is more than able to bear the weight of your burdens, but He can’t do that as long as you keep clinging to them. Let go. Let Him carry those for you. He is a burden-bearer extraordinaire.

Our Child-King Is a Problem Solver

In v. 6, we find four names for this Child-King. It is not five names. It is four. I believe the KJV got it wrong. It reads, “His name shall be called wonderful (comma) counselor.” Most versions take out that comma. Therefore, instead of *wonderful* being a name for the Child, *wonderful* tells us what kind of counselor the Child will be. He will be a wonderful counselor.

I believe the first, two titles that are given to this Child-King demonstrate, in one way

or another, that He is a problem solver.

1. He Solves Problems by the Counsel He Extends.

If you were here last Sunday, you will remember that the message focused on the idea of “taking counsel.” Many people opt to take counsel from their peers or from authorities or from themselves. We recommended taking counsel from God. We need to know what God has to say about our situation, about the direction we need to go, and how to get there. God often offers that direction through godly people who are walking with Him. We need to seek and listen to wise, godly counsel.

He offers guidance and direction through His inspired Word. We need to read the Bible and do so prayerfully because prayer is another one of those avenues through which God speaks to us.

Prayer is two-way communication. Can you imagine having a conversation in which only one person speaks. That would be a monologue. It would not be a conversation. I believe that when we pray it often looks and sounds more like a monologue than a conversation. When we pray, we need to take some time to be silent and give God an opportunity to talk to us.

There is a hymn in our hymnal entitled, “Take Time to Be Holy.” It is hymn #441. I invite you to look at it. I would like to amend that hymn to read, “Take Time to Be Quiet.” If we changed the word *holy* to read *quiet*, this is how the hymn would read:

Verse 1: Take time to be quiet, Speak oft with the Lord

Verse 2: Take time to be quiet, The world rushes on

Verse 3: Take time to be quiet, Let Him be thy guide

Verse 4: Take time to be quiet, Be calm in thy soul

God is an excellent problem solver. He knows exactly how we should approach a situation, what steps to take, what to do, and what not to do, but if we are going to access that counsel, we have to listen.

How well are you doing at listening to God? I have a theory that the problems we have in our relationship with God probably mirrors the problems we have in our relationships, period. The chief problem has to do with poor communication or maybe just a lack of communication. If you don’t talk or listen to your spouse or your children or your co-workers, etc., you probably aren’t talking to or listening to God either.

If we will work on talking to and listening to God, we will discover that He is a wonderful counselor.

2. He Solves Problems by the Power He Exerts.

Our text says that He is a Mighty God. A Mighty God is a powerful God. Such a God is a God whose will cannot be frustrated, whose acts cannot be stymied, whose displays of power cannot be equaled or stopped.

When Jesus walked upon this earth in the flesh during the three and half years of His ministry, He showed Himself to be a Mighty God.

- He turned water into wine.
- He stilled raging storms.
- He cast out raging demons.
- He gave sight to blind men.
- He opened the ears of deaf men.
- He enabled paralyzed men to walk and mute men to speak.
- He healed the sick, and fed the multitudes by multiplying a meager meal of bread and fish, and
- He raised the dead to life.

Have you noticed that every time Jesus used His power to perform a miracle, He did so to solve a problem? When He was at a wedding in Cana, the wine was about to run out. This would have placed a stigma upon the newlywed couple and their families. It would have been cause for great shame. Jesus acted on their behalf. He solved a problem by providing more than enough wine and making it the best wine in the estimation of the master of the wedding feast.

The disciples thought they were going to drown when they were out on Lake Galilee and a fierce storm arose. When experienced fishermen fear they are going to drown, you know the storm is bad, really bad. Jesus solved that problem when He stilled the wind and the waves with only a word.

All of those healing miracles solved a real problem—an inability to hear or speak or walk or see, etc. Multiplying food solved a hunger problem.

Here's the point: **If you've got a problem, you are a candidate for a miracle.** You can pretend that you don't have any problems if you want to, but all that will do is disqualify yourself from receiving the miracle that Jesus would otherwise do on your behalf. Embrace your problems, and let Jesus come to your rescue. When you are weak, He is strong.

This Child-King, Jesus, He is a Light-Giver, a Burden-Bearer, a Problem-Solver . . .

Our Child-King Is a Father Figure

Oddly, this Child-King acts like a Father, and not just any Father, but an Everlasting Father. He is the greatest example of the best dad you could ever have.

Pastor J.D. Greear claimed that there are four kinds of fathers who unknowingly inflict great pain upon their children. In fact, these four types of fathers do emotional damage that may plague their children their entire lives. They could be called:

- The Never Satisfied Dad.
- The Ticking Time Bomb Dad.
- The Emotionally Distant Dad.
- The Physically Absent Dad.

Jesus is none of those. He loves you. He is patient. He longs to bless you. He

promised to never leave or forsake you. Everything you wanted from your dad and never got, Jesus offers you, and it comes to you through a relationship with Him.

There is one last truth about the Child-King.

Our Child-King Is a Peace Maker

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Many world leaders hope for peace. They desire peace. They want peace. They propose peace. Jesus does far more than that. Jesus makes peace.

According to Ephesians 2:14, Jesus is our peace, and He made both Jews and Gentiles one. Jesus established peace between us and God, and He establishes peace between Jewish and Gentile believers. We are one in Him.

He is our peace. Because of Jesus, we can make peace with our past, be at peace in the present, and look to the future with a sense of great peace.

The greatest problem that a church faces or a community faces or a country faces or our world faces is a lack of unity; there is no peace. Jesus is more than able to solve that seemingly intractable problem because He is the Prince of Peace.

That is why the angels were able to tell those shepherds: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

What do you need today? Are you stumbling around in the darkness, and you don't know where the light-switch is? **Let Jesus shine His light on you.** Are you buckling under the weight and pressure of life? **Let Jesus bear your burden.** Are you facing problems you can't solve? **Let Jesus give you counsel and act on your behalf.** Are you suffering from father wounds? **Let Jesus Father you.** Do you need peace? **Come to Jesus who is your peace.**