

Main Idea: Who is the child that was born on that morning we call Christmas, and why do we need to know? The prophet Isaiah answered that question in a prophecy he delivered over seven hundred years ahead of time. Isaiah 9:6-7 gives us two important prophecies.

- I. We learn about a Marvelous Person (6).
 - A. He is the Wonderful Counselor.
 - B. He is the Mighty God.
 - C. He is the Everlasting Father.
 - D. He is the Prince of Peace.
- II. We learn about the Messianic plan (7).
 - A. This Person will be the final king.
 1. There will be no end to His government.
 2. There will be no end to His peace.
 - B. This Person will establish the final kingdom.
 1. There will finally be justice.
 2. There will finally be righteousness.
 - C. This Person will do all this because of the zeal of the LORD of hosts.

Take Inventory: Two questions are in order for each of us.

1. What place does the Marvelous One have in my life?
2. Am I living in light of the Messiah's plan?

To help us make the most of this special time of the year, we're doing a series this month called, "He's Coming! Isaiah Helps Us Prepare for Christmas." Last week we zeroed in on Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 7 that says, "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." This morning we're going to look at another significant prophecy, this one in chapter 9.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9

It was a hot summer day in August of 1986. Sherry and I were in the office of Dr. Stryck. He announced, "It's just about time for the baby to arrive. I estimate that I'll be seeing you again in the next 24 hours."

Waiting for our first baby to arrive consumed us. It was an all consuming hope. And Dr. Stryck was right. Within 24 hours our first child arrived and entered our lives.

This morning, I'd like us to look at another birth announcement. Ironically this birth announcement was made eight centuries before the child arrived. And the one who delivered this announcement wasn't a doctor, but a prophet of God named Isaiah.

Why was Jesus born? It's such a basic question, but there's tremendous confusion regarding the answer. Based on how His birth is celebrated in our day, it seems as if few people know why He was born?

Years ago I saw a neighbor wearing a shirt that said, "Deck the malls with lines of credit."

One satirist updated the carol to make it fit our contemporary situation, "Angels we have heard on high, tell us to go out and buy."

Then there was the little boy who thought the carol said, "O come let us ignore him."

Without question, we need help. Who is the child that was born on that morning we call Christmas, and why did He come, and why do we need to know?

We've opened our Bibles to a text that can bring clarity to our confusion. In Isaiah 9:6-7, the prophet Isaiah addressed these questions by delivering two prophecies over seven hundred years ahead of time. In the first we learn about a marvelous person. In the second, the Messianic plan.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC on 12/24/89.

It's important to have the right posture as we look at today's text. This is a familiar passage. You've likely seen it before, perhaps many times. So how should we look?

Think of looking at Isaiah 9:6-7 as though you were looking at the Mona Lisa. Hundreds of people are standing in line at the Louvre in Paris. You wait your turn and finally and you are standing in front of this piece of art created by Leonardo da Vinci over five hundred years ago (between 1503 and 1506). You've seen pictures of her before, but now you're in front of the real thing. You see a woman with a trace of a smile on her face, and you don't say, "Interesting, a smiling woman," and move on. No, you gaze at the painting for as long as the anxious crowd behind you will allow. Why? Because in the world of art, this is greatness.

Or to use a sports analogy, it's like when Michael Jordan hit "The Shot" on May 7, 1989, to eliminate the Cavs in Game 5 of the NBA playoff series. You see him pumping his fist into the air, and you don't say, "Interesting, the ball went in. But I've seen it before. No big deal." No, watch that shot again and again, year after year, because in the world of basketball, that is greatness.

Or perhaps your thing is baseball. You may have seen Kirk Gibson hit that walk-off homerun in Game 1 of the 1988 World series, but if it popped up on your smart phone this afternoon, you'd watch it again, and again next week probably. Why? Because in the world of baseball, that is considered to be one of the greatest plays ever made.

Or to change analogies, think of your favorite song. Why do you keep listening to it, over and over, year after year? For the same reason. You don't listen to it to hear something new necessarily, but because in your estimation, it's a great song.

When something is great, I mean, really great, you can't get enough of it. You want to see it again and again. And you want others to join you in the experience, which is why you talk about it, and call attention to it, again and again.

Think of it this way. Can you imagine someone being in the crowd when Michael hit The Shot and saying, "Boring! I thought that game would never end. Let's go eat!?" Hardly. If a person next to us said something like that, we'd likely say, "What?! Are you dead?!"

It's unthinkable to be in the presence of true greatness, and want the moment to end quickly. Unless we are dead. Which of course, in spiritual terms, we are. All of us. We are spiritually dead to the great things of God. They are boring to us, until the Spirit of God gives us a new heart and eyes that can see and appreciate true greatness.

So you've seen it before, but lean in and gaze upon the greatness of Isaiah 9:6-7 yet again. And if you find yourself bored at what you're seeing, I encourage you to ask the Lord to give you a new heart and eyes that can see and appreciate the true greatness of what's before us.

I. We learn about a Marvelous Person (6).

Verse 6, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

For to us a child is born. Who is this child concerning whom Isaiah is speaking? Why is he giving this birth announcement?

In the Bible, every text has a context. What's the context here?

Historical Context: First, there's a historical context. Isaiah ministered in the eighth century BC. In many ways, his world was a lot like our own. King Uzziah reigned in Judah for 50 plus years in the first part of the eighth century. Those were days of economic prosperity and political security. There was freedom on the Middle East due to the absence of any major military rivals. But then King Uzziah, the king of the southern kingdom of Judah, died. And the foundation of security in the country began to erode.

Two questionable kings would lead Judah next, Jotham and Ahaz. Under their leadership God's people committed apostasy. They turned away from the Lord who had brought them into existence, and they began to compromise in their associations with pagan people and practices. Simultaneously, economic conditions deteriorated. Yes, things were tough in Judah.

Into that setting, Isaiah the prophet ministered. His ministry spanned at least four kings and 50 years. Through the ministry of forthtelling, Isaiah proclaimed the Word of God to his people, seeking to bring spiritual and moral reform. Yet more often than not, his words fell on deaf ears and calloused hearts. He faced what Jesus later described when He said, "Men love darkness rather than light."

But prophets were foretellers as well as forth-tellers, and through his ministry of foretelling, Isaiah announced that two things were coming. One, there would be consequences to the disobedience. God was sending judgment, described in Isaiah 1-39. But God was also going to send hope, described in Isaiah 40-66.

How would this hope come? Through the Servant.

Theme of the book of Isaiah: Servant

God had called Israel to be His servant, but Israel failed (1:2-4; 41:8; 42:19). Israel would be judged for her sinfulness, as described in chapters 1-39.

Did this mean that God had abandoned His purpose for Israel? No. He promised to raise up The Servant to restore His unfaithful servants (49:3, 6-7).

How would The Servant restore the unfaithful servants? In a most unexpected way. By His vicarious suffering as a substitute (52:14; 53:11).

Immediate Context: Isaiah's conversation with King Ahaz in chapter seven

Following the death of King Uzziah, the world scene became very unstable. The military empire of Assyria swept through the surrounding lands, conquering and deporting people in merciless fashion. The northern kingdom of Israel and Syria joined in a coalition to defend themselves against Assyria. They asked (or rather demanded) the southern kingdom of Judah to join with them. But Judah declined. And the result? Notice the text...

7:1 – Syria and Israel attached Jerusalem in Judah.

7:3 – The Lord told Isaiah to go and meet with Ahaz to let him know that there was no need to fear. The Lord Himself would protect Judah. In fact, the Lord told Ahaz to ask for a sign that victory would occur. But how did Ahaz respond?

7:12 – "I will not ask, neither will I test the LORD." Was Ahaz showing great faith? No. He actually had no faith, other than in himself, and was already conjuring up a way to get out of this jam without trusting God. So how did the Lord respond? He gave him a sign anyway!

7:14 – "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Notice how the Lord instructs Isaiah to use his children to communicate God's message. First, he tells him to take his son, Shear-jashub, to meet Ahaz in 7:3 (his name means "a remnant shall return"). Next, He announces that a virgin will conceive and bear a child who will be called "Immanuel" in 7:14. This name is repeated in 8:8, 10, and it means "God with us." Then we meet Maher-shalal-hash-baz in 8:3, which means "Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." This was the son born to Isaiah and the prophetess whom he just married. In 8:18 Isaiah says this, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion."

So Isaiah's children were signs that represented what the Lord planned to do with His people. But there's one more child that Isaiah mentions, and this clearly was not his own child. We meet him in today's text, 9:6, "For to us a child is born."

Don't miss what's happening. The Lord wanted Ahaz to trust him. The Lord wanted the nation of Judah to trust Him. If His people were every to become genuine servants who would

faithfully serve Him, they had to learn that their God could be trusted, and that the nations cannot be trusted. But Ahaz refused to trust. In fact, Ahaz would eventually send out an SOS call to none other than Assyria requesting help against Israel and Syria. This was sheer foolishness, sort of like a mouse asking a cat for help against another mouse! Assyria would help, alright, but in less than forty years Assyria would turn on Judah and nearly annihilate the country. It all happened because the king and his people would *not* trust in the Lord.

Trusting the Lord is a big deal, and refusing to trust Him with our problems is sheer folly that produces a certain, disastrous outcome.

Indeed, things were bleak for God's people due to the lack of faith. In 722 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered and deported by Assyria. Judah floundered like a spiritual roller-coaster, inconsistent in her service for the Lord. Blessed by the Lord, and willing to take His blessings, but refusing to trust Him and serve Him alone.

It was into this context that the Lord told Isaiah to make a dramatic birth announcement. Here's the immediate context in chapter nine, verses 1-5:

"But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. ³ You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. ⁴ For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire."

So, something special is coming. A great light that will dispel the darkness. From where? From beyond the Jordan River, in Galilee. Can anything good come out of Galilee? Indeed, yes. A special child is coming. And the government, which has been so unpredictable and unreliable, will be upon his shoulder. Was that important? It was if you were a Jew in the eighth century BC. Or in any other country for that matter. People had suffered for centuries because of faulty leadership. But according to Isaiah, that would change. God was sending the world a leader unlike any other.

"For unto us a child is born, and the government shall be upon his shoulder."

This would indeed be a marvelous child! What would make Him so special? Of all the things Isaiah could have mentioned, here's the one he chooses in verse 6. His *name*. What would make this child so marvelous? He would be given a special name.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and *his name shall be called...*" In Isaiah's day a person's name meant much more than in ours. A name represents the person, his character, his reputation, his accomplishments. And the name of this marvelous child tells us much about the king of person He would be.

What makes this a marvelous person? He possesses four descriptive titles.

A. He is the Wonderful Counselor. Literally, "a wonder of a counselor." This title teaches us about the Messiah's wisdom.

One of Judah's greatest problems was her propensity to rely on human wisdom, instead of God's. And human wisdom eventually fails. Not so the wisdom of the coming Messiah, says Isaiah.

He will be a wonder of a counselor. And why would that be? Because His counsel would go beyond human realms. Later in Isaiah 11:1-2, the prophet has this to say about this Wonderful Counselor. "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."

Later in Isaiah 28:29 we read, “This also comes from the Lord of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.”

One of the first principles we teach in biblical counseling training is data gathering. Proverbs 18:13 says, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” In other words, a sure way to give foolish counsel is to speak before you hear and have a full understanding of the problem at hand.

But the Wonderful Counselor doesn’t need to do data gathering. He already knows. Knows what? He knows everything, about everything.

1 Corinthians 1:30 says this, “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption...”

Colossians 2:3 “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Do you remember what the crowds said about Jesus when they heard Him? What amazed them? Listen to Matthew 13:54–55, “And coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? ⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?’”

His wisdom set Him apart from others. He didn’t seem to fit. The people had never heard anyone like Him. Why? Because this “carpenter’s son” was a Wonderful Counselor, just like Isaiah had prophesied.

B. He is the Mighty God. Whereas “Wonderful Counselor” speaks of Messiah’s wisdom, “Mighty God” speak of Messiah’s deity. This was a staggering announcement from the Lord through Isaiah. The One who’s coming, who will enter the world as a child, will be none other than the Mighty God Himself.

In his article, “God in a Manger,” John MacArthur ponders this staggering truth, “Christmas is not about the Savior’s infancy. It is about His deity. The humble birth of Jesus Christ was never intended to conceal the reality that God was being born into the world.”

It’s common to hear people say, “There are many ways to God, as long as you’re sincere.” But the manger scene, when properly understood, says, “Not so. That child, and that child alone, is the Mighty God Himself!”

Camp on that word *mighty*. He has the might, the power, the clout, the authority, that puts Him in a class all by Himself.

Isaiah 45:24 says, “Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; to him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him.”

The psalmist says in Psalm 50:1, “The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.”

Notice what Paul has to say about Jesus in Titus 2:13, “Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...”

My friend, don’t be lulled to sleep by the unassuming, meek and mild nature of the manger scene. That babe that Mary is holding is the Mighty God come in human form. That’s why the shepherds are worshipping Him, and why later the wise men will bow before Him.

When you enter the presence of One who is *mighty*, that’s the fitting response. To bow. To assume a position of submission. And if you know that this Mighty One actually loves you, and says He came to earth to save you from a life that’s self-destructing in sin, the fitting response, the only response that makes sense, is to say to the Mighty One, “Be glorified, be mighty in my life! You are worthy!”

C. He is the Everlasting Father. This title speaks of Messiah’s eternity.

Middle-eastern kings often claimed to be a father figure to their people, and even their captives. Yet of course, their fatherhood was self-proclaimed, and temporal at best. Every earthly king eventually died. Kings came and went.

But there's coming a King, says Isaiah, who is different. He will be an everlasting Father.

We can't escape the emphasis on the divine nature of this coming Messiah in these four titles, especially this one. The Jews of Isaiah's day knew that God Himself used this title, and said He was their Father. Listen to Isaiah 64:8, "But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand."

Who is our Father? God, Yahweh, is, affirmed every devout Jew for centuries, even to this day. But when Jesus of Nazareth entered time and history nearly 750 years after Isaiah uttered these words, He said to Philip in John 14:9–11, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves."

D. He is the Prince of Peace. This title teaches us about Messiah's royal lineage. It is fitting that it should appear last, for it essentially is the climax. In giving the birth announcement, Isaiah reveals that this marvelous child will be, not just *a* prince, but *the* prince. He will be a ruler, a divine ruler, a king, *the* king.

And what kind of king will He be? A peaceful king. A king who will establish what the world lost when the first man and woman sinned in the Garden of Eden. Shalom.

We can take this in a couple of ways. He will come *in* peace, that is, peacefully. He will not be a brutal dictator who squashes all defiance, but a humble leader. Indeed, He will come as a seemingly insignificant child.

But not only will He come *in* peace, but He will come *for* peace. He will bring about peace, peace with God, peace with fellow human beings, peace within ourselves. The prince of peace will come to reconcile this fragmented world back to God, back to God's intent.

And how will He do it? How will the Prince of peace give this world what it has lacked ever since the garden? Isaiah answers that question in the prophecy of Isaiah 53:5, "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was **the chastisement that brought us peace**, and with his wounds we are healed."

That is exactly what the Prince of peace did the first time He came to earth. He brought us peace. How? Through the chastisement that was upon Him, speaking of His cross. He was pierced, nailed to a cross. Why? For our transgressions, and for our iniquities. He took our sin upon Himself, and paid the penalty for it in our place. And this chastisement that He endured brought us peace with God.

You say, "I want peace with God. How can I experience it?"

Here is the answer. Acknowledge why you lack it—because you have sinned against God. And then accept the provision His Son made for your sin, by believing in Him and receiving Him as your Savior and Lord.

But there's more. The Prince of peace isn't done. Indeed, He's coming to earth again, and here's what the Prince of peace will accomplish when He comes a second time. Isaiah gives us this prophecy in Isaiah 11:6–9, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

My friend, I'll say it again. We're beholding true greatness. In Isaiah 9:6, we see a Marvelous Person. He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. O come let us adore Him!

But there's more to see, so let's keep looking! In verse 7 Isaiah gives a prophecy concerning what this Marvelous Person is going to do when He comes.

II. We learn about the Messianic plan (7).

Verse 7, "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."

Isaiah learned a painful lesson that we're learning. National peace is often short-lived. In the case of Israel, it came and went as quickly as did their leaders. Under King David and Solomon, they enjoyed peace, but then it was gone. Civil war split the country in two. Later they enjoyed a taste of peace under King Uzziah, but then he died and Assyria invaded and began to dominate the economy and everything else. A century later, they began to enjoy some peace as the result of reforms initiated by King Josiah, but then he too passed from the scene, dying at the young age of 39. And then the Babylonians conquered them, and the nation of Israel has yet to see peace on a national scale again.

But that peace is coming, says Isaiah in the prophecy of verse 7. And the Marvelous Person predicted in verse 6 is going to bring it. Isaiah gives us three insights in verse 7.

A. This Person will be the final king. There will be none others after Him. Why not? Because He is not going anywhere. He will never die. He will never be overthrown by enemy forces. Isaiah says, "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end."

Amazing. Two things will never end under His leadership.

1. *There will be no end to His government.*
2. *There will be no end to His peace.*

Solomon had an impressive government, and even the Queen of Sheba praised him for it. But he didn't finish well, and when he died, the country split, and the government ended, and sadly, so did the peace.

That will not happen under the reign of the Marvelous Person. In the plan of God, this Person will be the final king.² What's more...

B. This Person will establish the final kingdom. Notice the next phrase in verse 7, "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore."

Under the rule and reign of the coming Messiah, says Isaiah, there will be two outcomes that no other king in Israel could produce. For that matter, nor could any other world ruler.

1. *There will finally be justice.*
2. *There will finally be righteousness.*

Justice and righteousness. When the Marvelous Person comes, He will take His place on the throne of David, and will establish both.

Justice—He will ensure that things are the way they are supposed to be. And *righteousness*—He will establish a kingdom where everything is *right*; people are right with God, right with each other, and with everything being right internally too.

The world has never seen this kind of kingdom, but it will, when the final king establishes His final kingdom. And He did. And He will.

You say, "Which is it? Past, or future?"

² Psalm 89:35–37 "Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. ³⁶ His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. ³⁷ Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies."

It's both. Look in that manger. What do you see? The King, right? And wherever you see the King, you see His kingdom. What are the people around Him doing? Look at Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men. They are *worshipping Him*. And later we meet people like Peter, James, John, and others. And what are they doing? They're putting their faith in this King, and living their lives for Him and His kingdom purposes.

And wherever His people go, they are like salt and light, spreading His influence. He brings justice and righteousness to the world through them. And even though He has returned to heaven, He continues to advance His kingdom purposes through them, reaching others, saving others, transforming others, as they proclaim and live out the implications of His glorious gospel.

Isaiah had this to say about the final King and His kingdom in Isaiah 11:3–5, “And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.”

This is the kind of world this Child-King will establish, predicts Isaiah, a world where justice, righteousness, and peace prevail. And this Child-King has come, and right now He's ruling and reigning in the lives of His people.

Yet before He left, He said He would be back. And then He will finish what He started, and there indeed will finally be justice and righteousness in all the earth.

“But can we be sure?” you ask. Yes, and here's why.

C. This Person will do all this because of the zeal of the LORD of hosts. Notice the last phrase in verse 7. This Messianic Plan does not depend on people, for people can fail. It depends upon the zeal of One who never fails. And who is that? The LORD of hosts. Isaiah loves this title for God, as do the other latter prophets who served during times when foreign armies occupied the promised land. When you're forced to see powerful enemy forces in control, you long for the day when Someone who is more powerful rescues you and makes everything right.

My friends, there is no one more powerful than the LORD of hosts. And He has given us this guarantee. “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”

We've seen greatness today, haven't we? We've seen the Marvelous One, and there's none whose worth compares to Him. Doesn't it make you long for more? Don't you want to see Him more clearly? Don't you desire that for others too?

Then continue to do what we've done today. Open your Bible every day and get to know Him. Make it your number one goal this week, and every week to follow, to know, and enjoy, and worship, and glorify the Most Marvelous Being in the universe.

Take Inventory: Two questions are in order for each of us.

1. *What place does the Marvelous One have in my life?*
2. *Am I living in light of the Messiah's plan?*

Closing Song: #170 “One Day” (all five verses)