

## “What Child is This?”

*Scripture Readings: Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 2:8-14*

December 16, 2018 • Rev. Nollie Malabuyo

Today is the third Sunday of the Advent season. This season, the month of December, I’m preaching on the beautiful songs of Christmas, and how they refer to the Bible. In the last two Sundays, we studied the hymns, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” and “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming.” Today, we will study the beautiful Christmas hymn, “What Child is This?” This is one of the more Biblical modern Christmas hymns. It came from a longer Christmas poem, “The Manger Throne,” written by William C. Dix, an English lay hymnwriter about 1865. The melody “Greensleeves” is a traditional English folk tune.

But although it is filled with Biblically-sound lyrics, there’s a line that bothers me: “the King of kings salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone him.” Why? Because Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. We do not enthrone him; God enthroned him. We do not make Jesus our personal Lord, Savior and King. He is *the* Lord, Savior and King, because God appointed him to be so.

Let us now look at the rest of the hymn. The first stanza is made up of rhetorical questions about the newborn Jesus. Isn’t this Son of Mary the King whom shepherds and angels worshiped? The second stanza is a praise to the child who is the Word from eternity, who would sacrifice his life to save his people from their sins. And the third stanza talks about the three wise men who brought him gifts to honor and worship him as King and sacrifice. So the song is a praise to Christ as he is our Prophet, Priest and King.

Our text comes from Isaiah Chapter 9 which opens with a scene in the Promised Land of both gloom and rejoicing. It is set in 722 B.C. when the northern kingdom was already taken captive by and scattered throughout the Assyrian empire. The northernmost tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were already exiled, and therefore were already in gloom and anguish and were “walking in darkness.” King Ahaz of the southern kingdom of Judah did not trust God’s promise of redemption and allied himself instead with Egypt and Syria. In judgment, God sent King Sennacherib of Assyria to lay siege on Jerusalem.

What were the prospects for salvation of the people? How is God going to respond to their pleas for mercy? God says that those same people who walked in darkness “*have seen a great light*” and the people and their harvest will be great, and they will rejoice. Why? Into all of this darkness of sin, oppression, idolatry, and ignorance, God has given a Son.

Some think that Isaiah’s prophecy was about Hezekiah, the newborn son of King Ahaz, who would be a great king of Israel. He was promised in 7:14 as a sign to Ahaz of God’s promise of salvation for his nation and will be called Immanuel. But two of the titles are clearly divine and messianic: Mighty God and Everlasting Father. In the Old Testament, the title “Mighty God” was always designated for God himself. And “everlasting” or eternal was always reserved for God.

This Son has the fourfold titles of Divine Savior and Messiah: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. We will meditate on each of these titles this morning.

## Wonderful Counselor

The word *wonderful* describes God's wondrous, marvelous deeds in creation and in redemption of his people. The Hebrew word translated as "wonderful" and "marvelous" occurs about 80 times in the Old Testament. It often refers to the wonderful, marvelous deeds of God.

What are these wonderful, marvelous deeds? The dividing of the Red Sea and its safe crossing by the children of Israel; leading them through the wilderness by the pillar of cloud and fire; splitting the rocks of the desert to give them water; and the miraculous provision of manna and quails from heaven. Jesus also performed works that are called "signs and wonders," because they were "wonderful" (Acts 2:22): healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, feeding 5,000 people with two fish and five loaves, and calming the storm at sea. Through the apostles, he continued performing these signs and wonders (Acts 2:43).

The Hebrew word for *counselor* is one who gives counsel (1 Kgs 12:6). A king needs many counselors (1 Chr 27:32-33), especially in times of war, "*for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory*" (Prov 24:6). God has wisdom, counsel and understanding (Job 12:13). The LORD "*is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom*" (Isa 28:29).

This Child, the Son of David, has no need for counsel, because he is the wisdom of God. The promised Messiah will have wisdom, understanding, knowledge and the fear of the LORD (Isa 11:2). He was wiser than Solomon, the wisest of all men in all human history (Matt 12:42). The word for "counselor" also means "helper" or "comforter." In Isaiah 40:1, God promised his people Israel that there will be a "Comforter" to rescue them from exile because their sins have been forgiven. Jesus is that Helper and Comforter, and he continues to be our Helper and Comforter through the Holy Spirit, "another Helper" (John 14:16-17).

These two words, "wonderful Counselor," describe Jesus from his youth to his adulthood. At age 12, he astonished learned Jews with his questions, answers and understanding. When he taught, the crowds were astonished at this teaching and his authority (Matt 7:28-29). The Apostle Paul described Jesus as one in whom "*are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (Col 2:3).

What Child is this who was born in Bethlehem? He is the Wonderful Counselor.

## Mighty God

The second term used for the child born to us and given to us by God is "mighty God." This is unmistakable clarity: a child born of a human mother is mighty God himself! How can this be? Because not only is he an ordinary child, but he is also the Son of the Most High (Luke 1:32).

The title "Mighty God" obviously means a powerful God. In fact, he is Almighty, most powerful than anyone or anything in the whole universe. In the Old Testament, the LORD is called "Mighty God," "*For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God*" (Deu 10:17; also Isa 10:20-21; Neh 9:32; Jer 32:18). In Hebrew, the word "mighty" comes from a word translated as "warrior." Therefore, God is a "mighty Warrior," as in Isaiah 42:13 where he is called "*a mighty man... a man of war... [who] shows himself mighty against his foes*" (also Exo 15:3). Since God is also the King of his people, he leads them in battle against

their enemies. He led Moses and all Israel in their escape from slavery in Egypt. He led Joshua and his army in the conquest of Canaan the Promised Land. He led Gideon, Samson and the other judges to redeem Israel from foreign oppressors. And he led many of the kings of Israel in war against foreign invaders. But because of Israel's unbelief and rebellion against God, God also sent Assyria and Babylon to conquer and destroy his people.

When Jesus first came, he did not come as a Mighty Warrior-King. Instead, he arrived as a meek and humble child born in a lowly manger. He lived a life of suffering and persecution leading to his shameful and accursed death on the cross. At that moment, Satan seemed to conquer him, but God's curse against the devil in Genesis 3:15 was actually fulfilled then, "*He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*" This is why Hebrews 2:14 says about the humble Jesus, "*through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.*"

The devil does not stop in tempting and deceiving us to sin against God. Jesus says unbelievers are slaves of their father the devil (John 8:41, 44). So John echoes Jesus in 1 John 3:8, "*whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil.*" Since therefore all unbelievers are slaves of the devil, they are not free. When it comes to things about salvation by faith in Christ, they have no "free will" to choose Christ. And Paul also says that we were formerly slaves of sin, but now as forgiven believers, we are now slaves of Christ (Rom 6:16-18). So he exhorts us to bear good fruits in our lives, fruits that lead to sanctification and eternal life (Rom 6:22). How do we get this fruit of sanctification and eternal life? By putting on the whole armor of God against the devil, and by taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus leads us in our warfare against the spiritual forces of evil and darkness led by the devil (Eph 6:10-17).

Therefore, the Apostle Paul promises in Romans 16:20, "*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.*" When Jesus returns from heaven as he promised, he will not come as a meek, humble man to suffer and die for our sins. He will return as a mighty conquering warrior, as the King in Psalm 24:8, who enters the gates of his kingdom in victory, "*Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!*" In Revelation 19:11-16, He will come as a Mighty Warrior-King on a white horse to conquer and to judge in righteousness. He will crush the unbelieving nations with a sword, the Word of God, and bring down the wrath of God on them. On that day, Jesus will be a Mighty Warrior-King who will crush Satan and all his enemies, such as the Chinese and Muslims who persecute and murder his people all over the world.

What Child is this who was born in Bethlehem? He is the Mighty Warrior-God.

## **Everlasting Father**

How can Jesus the Messiah be the Everlasting Father? Isn't this confusing the First and Second Persons of the Trinity? These questions are valid for all who subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity.

But the title "Everlasting Father" given to the Child born to us is not a Trinitarian title since the doctrine of the Trinity was not yet developed in the Old Testament. Jesus is our "Father" in five ways. First, this name gives all Christians comfort and peace because a "father" is a good provider and protector (Isa. 22:21; Job 29:16). God's character of love, compassion, and forgiving sins are also the character of Jesus the Messiah because the Father and the Son are of one and the same

essence. As the Father in heaven gives good gifts, so does Jesus. As the Father in heaven gathers his sheep, so does Jesus. As the Father has compassion on the poor, the sick, the grieving, the widow and the orphans, so does Jesus. As the Father forgives those who repent of their sin, so does Jesus.

Second, in Isaiah 53:10, we read that after the Suffering Servant finishes his sacrifice on the cross, *“he shall see his offspring.”* This is why John 1:12 declares, *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”* We become children of God by faith alone in Christ alone, who is God himself, and who is our Father because we are his “offspring.” Paul affirms this in Galatians 3:26, *“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”* Jesus is our “father” because we are children of God, and Jesus is eternal God.

Third, because he is God, he is eternal. He is the Son of God from eternity past to eternity future. Therefore, he is the “Father of eternity,” though he was born as an infant 700 years after Isaiah’s prophecy. Fourth, because he is Eternal God, he is our “father” forever. Jesus can never cease to be our Father who provides and protects us, and we cannot ever cease to be his children at any moment in our lives. Fifth and last, Jesus says that he and God the Father are one. *“I and the Father are one”* (John 10:30). *“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”* (John 14:9; 12:45).

What Child is this who was born in Bethlehem? He is the Everlasting Father.

### **Prince of Peace**

Lastly, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. The angel announced this to the shepherds. The faulty assumption that he was born to bring peace among nations in this age comes from the KJV, *“on earth peace, good will to men.”* The ESV and the NIV translate it better, *“on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased [on whom his favor rests].”* Though perfect peace will be the final state of the world after Jesus returns as King of kings, the peace he brings today is between God and sinners. God and sinners are at war, but faith in Jesus alone will bring reconciliation and peace between a wrathful God and all repentant sinners (Rom 5:1; Col 1:20).

He is the Prince and King, whose reign will bring about peace because he ordained peace on earth before the creation of the world. He will be the righteous Judge between nations. When he returns and destroys all his enemies, no evil will remain. Therefore, there will be universal peace, and no more war forever (Isa 2:4). Our text tells us that the increase of peace during his reign will never end. Isaiah 11:6-9 describes this universal peace: even the lion will dwell with the lamb, and little children will play with the cobra. God promises that in the new heaven and new earth, all children will be taught by the LORD, and they shall have great peace (Isa 54:13).

Therefore, faithful Jews longed for the Messiah, because he will bring peace (Luke 1:79; 2:29). They sang about it when Christ entered Jerusalem for the last time (Luke 19:38). Before he was arrested and crucified, Jesus encouraged his disciples, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you... I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace”* (John 14:27; 16:33). Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would be *“pierced for our transgressions”* to bring us peace (Isa 53:5).

When we consider the title Prince of Peace, think of the benediction by Aaron, ending in *“the Lord give you peace.”* Remember Paul's greeting to the saints, which we read at the beginning of each

service, “*Grace, mercy and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Jesus gives us peace that surpasses all our understanding. Therefore, one of the gifts of the Spirit is peace.

What Child is this who was born in Bethlehem? He is the Prince of Peace.

**D**ear friends, our Lord Jesus Christ was given to you as a gift from God on that first Christmas night. He is your Wonderful Counselor, giving you heavenly wisdom. He is your mighty King who rules over his Church, and in the coming age, rule over the whole earth. Justice, righteousness and peace in his kingdom will forever expand. Can you imagine this, after living in a sin-sick, depraved world? Even the Apostle Paul cannot, so he says, “*For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*” (2 Cor 4:17).

He is your eternal Father who provides for all your needs. And finally, he is the only One who has given you peace with God by reconciling you to him with his sacrifice on the cross. All praise, glory, honor and thanksgiving be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit!