

Christmas is always a busy time. It's a time of getting presents, a time of being with family, a time of having good food. And even though we are so busy at Christmas, it's always good for us to slow down and to think a little bit, and especially to reflect on the meaning of Christmas, to think about who Jesus is and what it is that he has come to do.

A good way for us to do this, Christians, is to consider the names that the Bible gives to Jesus. Because I know that names are often just names to us. We just think of them as ways to refer to somebody. But the names of Jesus tell us about who he is and what he means to us. For example, the Bible calls him the "Son of God." He is the one who has come down from the Father. And it is wonderful for us to know that the same God who made all things is the God who now comes to us to save us. The Bible calls Jesus the "Redeemer," the one who has come to buy us back, to set us free from our sins with his own blood. And it is a great comfort for us to know that Jesus has reconciled us with the Father forever. Even the name Jesus itself is worth thinking about, because the name Jesus means "God saves." And this Jesus has come to be our Savior and to bring us to the joys of heaven.

But the Bible also gives Jesus other names too. In fact, in our Old Testament reading for today, Isaiah gives him four. Isaiah chapter 9, verse 6 says this: "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." Now, those names that Isaiah gives to Jesus are what are called throne names. They are the names given to a king as he is coming into his reign. They describe what his rule is going to be like. They show us who this king is and what he's going to do. It may be helpful to think of them as a kind of political slogan, the way that politicians will use during an election season, so that when people remember that slogan, they remember what this politician is going to do. They remember everything about his campaign. And it's the same sort of thing here. These names show us who Jesus is and what he is going to do.

The kings of Egypt, for example, the pharaohs, often took a whole bunch of these kinds of names when they became pharaoh. And there'd be a whole list, as long as a paragraph, describing who they were and what they were going to do. And whenever people saw those names or said them or saw them written up on a monument or anything like that, they would remember who the Pharaoh was and what he had promised to do for them. And so it is here with Jesus.

But throne names were usually given when the king became king, at the beginning of his reign. It's not something that he had throughout his entire life. But Jesus is given these names at his birth, and even long before. He does not have to wait until he grows up to become the king. Jesus is already king from his very birth, from the very beginning. He is born into the world, and all of these things that are said about him are already true. There's no need for us to wonder if it's going to happen, the way that we might wonder if a politician is going to keep his promises. There's no need to wait for these things to come. To us a child is born, Isaiah says! To us a son is given! And because he is born, there is now light in the midst of darkness. Because he is born, he has brought joy to the nation. Because he is born, he breaks the rod of the oppressor. And because he is born, we can burn the war equipment, because there's not going to be a need for it anymore. At his birth, the government is laid upon his shoulder, and his rule and his peace will increase without end. Jesus is born at Bethlehem, and the world will never be the same again!

So let's look at these names and consider what they mean. The first two of these names tell us something about who he is, and the last two of these names say something about his reign and what it's going to be like. So let's consider the first. Jesus is the "Wonderful Counselor."

"Wonderful" in Hebrew can also be translated as "miraculous," so we could think of him as being a wonder-working counselor, someone who does great things, or we could think of him as a miraculous counselor, one who brings us supernatural wisdom. And in either case, the same is true of Jesus. Jesus has come into the world to bring us wisdom from on high. Jesus comes to open the eyes of the blind. Jesus comes to raise up the poor. Jesus comes to raise the dead. Jesus speaks to us the words of truth and life, and whoever keeps his word will never see death. What a comfort it is, Christians, to know that Jesus brings us the truth! That he comes to show us the way to heaven! He comes to break the power of sin! Because Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor, the one who leads us on the way to glory.

Jesus is also the "Mighty God." That word "mighty" is often used in the Bible to describe warriors, to describe someone who is strong like a warrior. So this warrior, then, our God comes to break the rod of oppression. He comes to take away the yoke that is on his people. He comes to break the power of evil. But he is not just a man. He is also God. And in power, God has come to us to be one with us. In power God has come to set us free. And what a tremendous comfort it is to know that our God comes to deliver us! That our God can bring good out of the midst of every situation! That our God has the power to transform our lives! There is nothing and no one who is beyond hope, no one who is beyond the power of God to save. And we know this because our God has been born in Bethlehem.

So those first two names, then, show us who Jesus is. The last two names tell us about something of how he will reign. Jesus is the "Everlasting Father." "Father" is a title that is often used for God in the Bible. God is the father of the poor and the oppressed. God is the father of the widow and the orphan. As a father provides for his children, so our heavenly Father provides for those who trust in him. He will not forsake them. He will not abandon them. He is not far away from their cries, as if he doesn't care. He is our true Father, the one who cares for us in all of our needs. Our earthly fathers care for us for a while, but they do the best they can and we appreciate them for it. But our heavenly Father will care for us forever. And what a joy it is to know that God hears and answers our prayers! His fatherly love is everlasting, and we have proof of that in the birth of Jesus Christ, his Son.

Finally, Jesus is the "Prince of Peace." To say that something is of something is a Hebrew way of saying that that's who they are. For example, if I say that someone is "a man of war," it means that they are warlike, that they are violent, the kind of person who knows how to fight. If I say that someone is "a man of blood," that means it is someone who sheds blood, often someone who is guilty of a great sin. So for Jesus to be the "Prince of Peace" means that he brings peace. Peace describes everything about him. He is peace itself. Because in Jesus, Christians, God brings peace to us, the peace of knowing that we are one with him, the peace of knowing that we are one with God, the peace of knowing that God and man have been reconciled in his Son. We have peace with God because of Jesus. And what a joy it is to know that Jesus brings us that peace! A peace beyond all human understanding! That he was born to reconcile us with the Father forever. And God is our Friend and our Father because of his Son, Jesus Christ.

So Christians, as we leave here today to return to the busyness of Christmas, let us not forget the names of Jesus, because they show us who he is and they show us what he has come to do. And remembering them will help us to focus on the true meaning of Christmas, and remembering them will also strengthen us in our faith until that day when we are joined with him in eternity. Then our Christmas joy will never come to an end!

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Wonderful Counselor, our Mighty God, our Everlasting Father, and our Prince of Peace, comfort us on this Christmas Day and bring us ever closer to yourself, so that we may rejoice in you and in your salvation forever; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.