

Advent 2018
His Name Shall Be...
Prince of Peace
Isaiah 9:6

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Our Sunday series for this month is called, "His Name Shall Be..." We are looking at just one of the biblical birth announcements for Jesus. Most birth announcements are sent in the mail *after* the baby is born, but in Jesus' case, one of his birth announcements was given about 750 years *before* he was born, by the prophet Isaiah:

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.

Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7, niv)

During this Advent month we have been digging a little deeper into what those four names meant about Jesus, what he came to do, and what they mean for us: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Advent means "arrival," and these names told people what to expect when the Christ arrived. Now that he's arrived the first time, they tell us who he is.

Now we come to the fourth name given to the child: Prince of Peace.

Because we live in a world that is longing for peace, Prince of Peace is a wonderful name. The world is not just longing for peace but is also worrying about whether it ever will or can ever achieve real peace.

Let me just say that it's pretty difficult to plan a sermon on the Prince of Peace and not think about the political turmoil our country is in right now. Politicians on both sides of the

¹ Todd Wilson, *The Gift of the Son: Prince of Peace*. ©2017 Christianity Today International

aisle seem to think that they or their party are the solution we need. It almost seems as though they think that *they* are the Child being described in Isaiah's prophecy!

It's a remarkable thing when someone running for office can, without blushing, promise that if elected, he or she will "keep America safe," "fix the mess in the Middle East," or "create prosperity in America," "provide for all the neglected and marginalized people in our nation," "raise up the oppressed," or "usher in a new American century."

The candidates might as well be saying to the American people, "Hey, vote for me, I'm the person in Isaiah's prophecy, that's me! I'm the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace! Put the government on *my* shoulders, and see what happens. Of the increase of *my* government and of peace there will be no end!"

My point is simply this: In our country's politics, the rhetoric gets messianic; the language gets almost eerily prophetic as candidates offer hope for the future that only God could ever deliver.

That is perhaps why politics in America are such a toxic mix of intense hope followed by anger and resentment as we come to realize that another would-be Messiah promises more than he or she can deliver. So let's look past them, to the One called Prince of Peace, starting with...

1. The ***twofold task*** of the Prince of Peace

Author and Pastor Todd Wilson points out that there is one who never overpromises or under-delivers but always makes good on precisely what he says and what he promises. He is the child described in the passage, the one Isaiah prophesied about many centuries ago, the one whom Christians now call Jesus.

Jesus Christ is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Everlasting Father, and as the focus of our attention in this message, the Prince of Peace. He is the one who actually brings peace into the world and into our lives—God's "shalom."

What a wonderful word the Hebrew word "shalom" is; it has all the connotations of peace in English but includes a whole lot more. It means not simply psychological ease but a holistic sense of fulfillment, well-being, and flourishing. That kind of comprehensive shalom-peace is what the Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, envisioned for the future.

The kind of Shalom the Prince of Peace will bring, according to Isaiah's prophecy, he achieves in two ways. *First, he achieves it by ending war.* Isaiah 9:4-5 says:

"You have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire." (Isaiah 9:4-5, niv)

Secondly, he will extend well-being, or promote safety, security, and human flourishing.

Remember we read Isaiah 9:7 that "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end." He will rule with "justice and with righteousness" and thus cause everyone under his reign and rule to flourish.

This is the twofold task of the Prince of Peace: the way he will put our world to right, a

process of peace-making that Christians believe began at Christ's birth and grows until it's completed when Christ returns in glory to consummate what he has begun.

Do you know where the Prince of Peace must begin if he is going to achieve peace? Do you know what is at the root of every lack of peace or at the core of all the violence and injustice and hostility in the world? Do you know the one thing no politician can do anything about because it can only be dealt with by the Prince of Peace?

2. Mutual *hostility* between *God* and *man*

That thing is our enmity with God. In our sin, we are at war with God. We are, because of our sin, combatants of God. That is our condition apart from saving grace found in Jesus Christ.

We are, the Bible says, enemies of God. In fact, the Bible says that in our sin we are hostile toward God. Paul explains it this way:

“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.” (Romans 8:7)

Whether we’re fully aware of it or not—and often, we aren’t—there is a deep-seated, internal hostility toward God in every fallen human being. Because of that, we instinctively suppress the truth about God. We don’t want to be confronted with the reality of his presence, and so we have very subtle and sophisticated defense mechanisms:

We “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” (Romans 1:20)

It’s like if you have had a falling out with someone, and whenever that person is near, you have a hard time acknowledging their presence. We do that with God. We are hostile toward God in our minds; we are at enmity with him.

But, check this out, the Bible also says that in our sin, God is actively opposed to *us*; God is angry with us. We have, understandably, a very hard time with that truth, because we think that if he is a loving God, he can’t also be angry with us. But the two are not mutually exclusive: when our boys were little and they would behave in hurtful ways or display bad choices, I would get angry with them: not because I *didn’t* love them, but because *I did*. Granted, I had to be sure I didn’t sin in my anger (Ephesians 4:26)! God loves us so much that he gets angry with us. And, we lose sight of the fact that God’s love is also so holy and by virtue of his nature is forever opposed to sin and evil in the world and in our lives.

Take a look at Romans 5:8-10 where we find a sobering description of our human condition. The point of the passage is to celebrate God’s amazing love in reconciling sinners to himself. But what we find in Paul’s celebration of God’s amazing love for us is a sobering description of our situation apart from the saving grace of God.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” (Romans 5:8-10, niv)

Notice a few key phrases: We were “sinners” (v. 8), upon whom the “wrath of God” rested (v. 9), and so Paul says, we were “enemies” (v. 10). But there’s a solution:

3. The Prince of Peace is the *Suffering Servant*

Being an enemy of God is our natural condition apart from the saving grace of God. That is why the cross of Christ is not optional but is necessary. If we are going to enjoy real peace with God, it is only going to come one way. It will *not* come by God ignoring our sin or making light of it, letting bygones be bygones, overlooking things and playing nice, or by moving on and sweeping our sin under the rug.

The only way peace with God will come is by God dealing head-on with our sin. That is precisely what he’s done through the birth of the child and the gift of the Son, the one whom we rightly call the Prince of Peace. Before Jesus was the Prince of Peace, he was first—for us and because of our sin—the Suffering Servant.

Isaiah 53 is perhaps the most powerful and moving prophecies about Christ to be found anywhere in the Old Testament. That’s why the first generation of Christians loved the passage and turned to it again and again to make sense of who Jesus was and what he had done.

Listen to Isaiah 53:1-5 which fills out the picture of the child to be born, the Son to be given, by describing in concrete detail what it is he will do for sinful humanity:

“Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:1-5, niv)

God put an end to the hostility between himself and sinful humanity at the cross when Jesus Christ, who had never sinned, became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him. So he made peace through the blood of his cross, peace between God and humans, by dealing with sin.

Do you know that peace? Have you embraced Christ by faith to find it? It is...

4. The peace we *now enjoy*

Perhaps it’s worth pointing out that the peace we enjoy through Christ is not necessarily circumstantial; that is, it’s not the case that the Prince of Peace will fix everything in your life or mine.

There almost certainly will be continued difficulties and hardships we have to face, conflict

we have to endure, and broken relationships we have to navigate and learn to live with. The Prince of Peace doesn't promise perfection in this life. What he does promise is deep personal and spiritual peace even in this life. Jesus talked about that kind of peace with his disciples; he promised them just that kind of peace even in a world he knew would be hostile to them.

In what is called his Farewell Discourse, his last teaching before he was betrayed and crucified, Jesus leveled with his disciples. He told them plainly that the world wouldn't take kindly to followers of another King whose reign disrupted the powers and patterns of this world. "In the world you will have tribulation," he says to them candidly (John 16:33). He also tells them, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace" (v. 33).

Earlier, he told his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27). When Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, do you remember his first words to them? Here is what we read:

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" (John 20:19)

That is what the Prince of Peace offers his followers, and it isn't just pie-in-the-sky peace but is the kind of peace that steadies in storms. This is the kind of peace that sustains us, the kind of peace you long to have when the world teeters out of control, or when circumstances in your life take a turn for the worse. This is the kind of peace that Christians have always known in hard times, the kind of peace they have celebrated in their lives, and have sung about in songs. It is the kind of peace celebrated in the powerfully moving hymn "It Is Well with My Soul" when the hymn writer says:

"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot,
Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul."

And so...

5. The Church is peace-bringers and peace-makers

Those of us who have been reconciled to God now enjoy peace with God. Because of this peace with God, we can enjoy peace with one another, with those who are united to Christ as members of his body, his church. The vertical peace we have with God translates into a horizontal peace we can enjoy with one another.

Paul celebrates this horizontal peace in Ephesians chapter two:

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached

peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household." (Ephesians 2:14-19, niv)

Christians are then to embody this peace in our relationships with one another in the body of Christ. The church is to be a place of peace, not a place of conflict, petty politics, racism, broken relationships, or other kinds of rivalries or infighting.

Instead, as Paul goes on to say in Ephesians chapter four, we're "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (v. 1-3).

As we embody peace in our relationships, we proclaim peace to the world. God has given the church, Paul says, "the ministry of reconciliation," which is not primarily horizontal reconciliation, though that is its necessary fruit and proof, but first takes vertical reconciliation; "that is," Paul explains, "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:19) Therefore, as Paul says, "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5:20)

So we have been given shalom in Christ, we can experience Shalom in Christ, and we are to bring and make shalom in this world.

Watch this video that will help us understand more what Shalom is that the Prince of Peace has brought us:

Shalom video:

<https://thebibleproject.com/all-videos/word-studies/> - (choose Shalom/Peace video)

Pray