**The Messianic names in Isaiah: an Advent reflection**

‘For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,

and the government with be on his shoulders.

And he will be called

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

 Isaiah 9:6

**Read Isaiah 9:1-7 and Psalm 119:1-32**

During this Advent season our Wednesday morning reflections will be looking at the Messianic names in Isaiah 9:6. According to Isaiah he would be called: ‘Wonderful Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father and The Prince of Peace.’

Over the next four weeks we will look at the four names of the Messiah in Isaiah. This morning’s reflection will look at Christ as our Wonderful Counselor, but firstly we will take a look at the context in which this prophecy was given.

In this passageIsaiah is speaking to the southern kingdom of Israel (Judah) before the Babylonian exile. Isaiah is speaking into a situation where Judah feels powerless, and they were afraid of the surrounding kingdoms. Their enemies only seemed to grow in strength and tighten their grasp, they didn’t know if God was for them or against them or if he had simply abandoned them. Among Isaiah’s prophecies are two prophetic visions of a child who would represent God’s presence, embody his characteristics, and bear the responsibility of governing his people, ‘For to us a child is born to us a son is given, and the government with be on his shoulders.’

Isaiah mentions four different names or titles for this child. ’And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’ Two of the titles this child will bear, Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace, *could* apply to a temporal being. And in a time when Judah desperately needed wisdom and peace, these would have been traits they greatly desired in a leader. But the other two, Mighty God and Everlasting Father, are names that would *seem* to clearly apply to God. But the Israelites weren’t expecting God to be born and live among them. They had no concept of the incarnation, and names and titles always carried symbolic weight to remind the Israelites about who their God was. So, they would have seen this prophecy differently. This prophecy of the coming Messiah that was given hundreds of years before his birth tells us that the child that was to be born would have some very amazing characteristics.

There is so much to be excited about when a baby is born. There is new hope for the future, and a name to be selected. Will the child be named after a family member? A friend? Will the name be trendy? Traditional? In Jewish tradition, names are carefully chosen and of great significance. It was no different in biblical times.

There was one baby whose coming would be so extraordinary that even astrologers saw the signs in the stars and came to pay their respect. The very birth of this child caused King Herod to be troubled (Matthew 2: 1-3).

Isaiah naming the Messiah the “Wonderful Counselor” indicates the kind of character this coming king has. The word *wonderful* in this passage literally means “incomprehensible.” The Messiah will cause us to be “full of wonder.” The word is much weightier than the way it’s used in conversation today. We say things are “wonderful” if they are pleasant or lovely. But Jesus is wonderful in a way that is baffling to the mind.

Jesus demonstrated how wonderful he was in various ways when he was on earth. He showed this in his power to heal ([Matthew 4:23](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%204.23)), his amazing teaching ([Mark 1:22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%201.22)), his perfect life ([Hebrews 4:15](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%204.15)), and his resurrection ([Mark 16:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%2016.6)). Jesus taught many wonderful things that are counterintuitive to the human mind and sound a bit odd or crazy: “Blessed are those who mourn” ([Matthew 5:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%205.4)). “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” ([Luke 6:27](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%206.27)). Jesus’ kind of wonderful is awe-inspiring and superior to any other kind, for he is perfect in every way ([Matthew 5:48](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%205.48)).

A real wonder is something beyond human explanation. And the prophet Isaiah declared that the coming child and Son would be a wonder. This not only describes what He does, it describes who He is.

The second part of the Messiah’s title is the word *counselor*. In ancient Israel, a counselor was portrayed as a wise king, such as Solomon, giving guidance to his people ([1 Kings 4:34](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Kings%204.34); [Micah 4:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Micah%204.9)). Isaiah uses this word again in 28:29 to describe the LORD: “This also comes from the LORD of hosts; he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.”

Jesus is a wise counselor. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote that in Jesus “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). Jesus likewise spoke about his own wisdom along the same lines: “The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:42). Jesus new the thoughts and motives of people and knowing about events before they occurred. He knew how to respond perfectly to each situation. He took a different approach for each person and situation. He does the same with us. He knows us, and love us and knows exactly what we need.

Christ as our Wonderful Counselor means we can trust him to listen to our problems and guide us in the right direction ([Proverbs 3:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov%203.6)). We can be sure he is listening because he told us to pray to him about our worries ([Philippians 4:6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%204.6); [James 1:5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James%201.5)). We can be certain he has our best interests at heart because he loves us ([1 John 4:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20John%204.19)). And His love is so wide and deep (and wonderful) that we cannot fully understand it ([Romans 5:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%205.8)).

Who is this child? Who is this Wonderful Counselor? He is a man who has walked in our shoes, felt our pains and struggled with our temptations. And he is walking with us now, every step of our journey.

So, what can we know about this Wonderful Counselor?

He **UNDERSTANDS** our struggles, ‘For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin’ (Hebrews 4:15, NIV).

He **CARES** for us. ‘God cares for you, so turn all your worries over to him.’ (1 Peter 5:7) Jesus cares about me and he cares about you. He cares about our character. He cares about our spiritual growth and emotional welfare. He cares about the pain we suffer. He considers us of value and of worth. ‘Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?’ (Matthew 6:26). Aren’t we worth more than the birds that fly around? God thinks so! He thinks you and I have value.

He is **COMMITTED** to us. Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with each of us. ‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me’ (John 10:27). This verse tells us that Jesus speaks to us. If we have a personal relationship with Jesus, he is committed to us and he talks to us.

As we wait for the coming of a new baby this Advent, we can hold on to the hope that he is our Wonderful Counselor. Despite these dark and difficult times we hold on to this hope, that knows us and loves us and never lets us go. He is with us this Advent, reminding us of his goodness and faithfulness. He understand out struggles, cares for us and its committed to us.

So, what can we learn this Advent about our Wonderful Counsellor? Take some time to reflect on what you have just read and think about where he has been a Wonderful Counselor in your life. Where has he guided you? When has he helped you? Where has he been faithful in your journey?

**Psalm 119:1-32**

This psalm is a psalm of glorifying God and his word. The Psalmist uses different phrases for God’s word such as his laws, statutes, ways, precepts, commandments, and judgments. The Psalmist speaks of following God’s law not as a a heavy burden but as I life line and many blessing are given to those who follow God’s laws, his guidance and direction. The Psalmist is telling us that God is the only one to show us the best and right way to live. It cannot be clearer than this psalm, of the great importance and significance of the word of God and his wise counsel. As we become more and more aware of his word and try to follow him faithfully, we come to treasure our relationship with God even more and are blessed as a result. Reading God’s word can bring us blessings and comfort. Why not take a moment to read this psalm again and see the importance and significance on holding onto and knowing God’s word.

Verse 11, a well known verse that I remember memorising as a young person, is teaching us to store up God’s word in our hearts. We talk about loosing heart or loosing faith, especially during these difficult times but the Psalmist is reminding us to store up God’s word in our hearts as a good survival strategy. We never know when life will throw us a curve ball that we couldn’t have expected, a brutal blow from which we will struggle to recover. This may be when we need God, his word and wise counsel, the most. When that happens, the spiritual resources we have stored in our hearts can help us to find our feet again.

As Isaiah tells us of a wonderful counselor, the Psalmist also talks about God being this wise counselor (Verse 24). He delighted and trusted in God’s word much more than in anyone else, even those who had high status or were known for their wise counsel. Sometimes we can be unaware of our need for God’s divine counsel and direction and are more inclined to lean to our own or others counsel. The Psalmist took his counsel from God, knowing that this was the best around. How many times do we lean on our own understanding and don’t seek God’s counsel, or go to a friend when we haven’t sought after God and his word? Why not, this Advent, spend some time reading his word, even small parts each day, asking God what he is saying to you through them. Despite the challenges of these times God’s word is still strong and endures forever.

**Prayers**

* Pray for Roads: Praying for people in our parish and this week pray for the following roads, Bedford Street, William Street and Cambridge Terrace.
* Pray for this who are in difficult and challenging situations who need to know God’s hope.
* Pray for Church and world leaders, prayers for wisdom during this time. Pray for our government, for wisdom to know what truth looks like in these turbulent times.
* Pray for those who feel lost, lonely, those who are isolated. Those who are suffering, mental health and physical health.
* Pray for the teachers and school workers, school children, young people and University students. For joy in learning and against anxiety in the classroom.
* Pray for the NHS and any front line staff.
* Let’s pray for those who are finding it hard to praise God in this time and for those whose faith is struggling and need God’s strength.
* Let’s thank God for his faithfulness and goodness. Thank God for his wise counsel and his word.