

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“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 ...” (Isaiah 9:6).

There are many prominent people who are known by their attributes. What I mean is that so many people are known by names that aren’t their actual name, but a name that describes their attributes.

When you hear “The Man in Black,” who do you think of? What about “The Piano Man”? What about “The Rock”? Each of these names describe attributes of singers Johnny Cash and Billy Joel, and wrestler-turned-actor Dwayne Johnson.

These titles were given to these men in addition to their actual names because those titles describe something about themselves or their work.

About 2,000 years ago, a man named Joseph was about to cancel his wedding plans with his fiancée named Mary. He was distraught, because he found out that his future wife was already pregnant – and he knew that he was not the father.

Joseph could only assume that Mary had cheated on him. However, God sent an angel to Joseph to explain to him that she was still a virgin. The only reason Mary was pregnant was that the Holy Spirit had worked a miracle and conceived a child in her womb. This angel then said to Joseph: ***“She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”*** (Matthew 1:21).

The name “Jesus” is a Hebrew name that means “God saves” – an appropriate name for the Son of God who took on human flesh so that He could save us from our sin by dying on the cross in our place of punishment.

After Matthew recorded those words of the angel, we learned: ***“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name ‘Immanuel’ (which means, God with us)’”*** (Matthew 1:22-23).

These words that Matthew quoted were from the prophet Isaiah. By the Holy Spirit, Isaiah was able to prophesy that one day in the future a virgin would give birth to a son who would be called “Immanuel” – God with us.

Even though this Child’s actual name would be Jesus, He would be known by other titles that would describe something about His person or His work.

In our first reading from Isaiah 9, Isaiah gives us details about the Messiah who would be born of a virgin. ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given ... and His name shall be called ...”*** (Isaiah 9:6). Isaiah says that this future child – the One born of the virgin who would be called “Immanuel” – this same Child would also be called by *other* titles!

“His Name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). This Child would not only be known as Jesus and Immanuel, but also four additional titles. Tonight, we will focus on that first title: “Wonderful Counselor.”

So, why “Wonderful Counselor”? Even before people understood Jesus was the Son of God, Jesus would amaze people with His wonderful teaching.

When Jesus was 12 years old, He was in Jerusalem teaching the teachers. We are told in Luke 2 that ***“all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers”*** (Luke 2:47).

Years later, after Jesus began His public ministry, more and more people were amazed at His counsel. Following Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, we learned that ***“the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes”*** (Matthew 7:28-29).

Simply put, the people were amazed because Jesus taught them as though He was God Himself giving wonderful counsel to His own people.

In tonight’s Gospel reading, Jesus said: ***“Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock”*** (Matthew 7:24-27).

After hearing Jesus say those words, some in the crowd may have recalled those words from Isaiah 26: ***“Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock”*** (Isaiah 26:4).

We all need the wonderful counsel of Jesus. As sinners, we are often misled by the cunning counsel of the evil one who works through unbelievers who despise the counsel of God. And as sinners, we are all tempted to listen to the foolish wisdom of the fallen world and ignore the wonderful counsel of Jesus.

Just such a tragedy happened in the days of Isaiah! God’s own people were listening to the counsel of unbelievers. Even many of the teachers of Israel were twisting God’s own Word and thereby giving evil counsel.

However, God preserved a few faithful men, such as Isaiah, and they preached and taught God’s Word in its truth and purity. Sadly though, many people in Isaiah’s day despised God’s wonderful counsel.

In fact, Scripture teaches us that unless the Holy Spirit gives us new hearts of faith that rejoice in God’s Word, we will see God’s Word as foolishness. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Paul writes: ***“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing”*** (1 Corinthians 1:18) And: ***“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned”*** (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Like the Israelites of Isaiah’s day, all of us here tonight are guilty of turning away from God’s wonderful counsel. We are guilty when we choose to skip the Divine Service. We are guilty when we choose to not be taught His Word through Bible study. In fact, we also sin even when we *do* hear and study God’s Word, but then doubt or question what God teaches us. We sin when our human reason trumps what God has spoken in His Word. We are all guilty of giving our attention to the foolish counsel of this fallen world while remaining ignorant or even defiant of God’s counsel of Law and Gospel.

But there is good news! ***“The people who walked in darkness – you and me – have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone”*** (Isaiah 9:2).

You see, God comes to us and speaks to us His wonderful counsel by which the Holy Spirit turns us away from the lies of the devil and gives us faith in the Gospel of Jesus!

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us – you and me – who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is so important for us to hear, read, and study God’s Word. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to convict us of sin, so that we might repent and put our faith in Jesus, who was born to save us from our sins. This same Holy Spirit uses God’s Word to cleanse our minds from the foolish counsel of this fallen world and replace it with the wonderful counsel of the Lord Jesus.

The book of Isaiah is full of God’s wonderful counsel. The prophet Isaiah tells us that God would give us a son – a child – to save us. He would be ***“pierced for our transgressions,” “crushed for our iniquities,” “upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed,”*** and ***“the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”*** (Isaiah 53:5, 6).

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us – *you and me* – who are being saved, it is the power of God! By the power of the Holy Spirit, we call Jesus our “Wonderful Counselor” because His Words are the Rock and Solid Foundation of our lives – now and for eternity!

Jesus – *our Wonderful Counselor* – loved you so much to be conceived in the womb of the virgin where His little hands and feet developed and grew so that they could one day be nailed to the cross where He would suffer and die for yours and my sins. Jesus – *our Wonderful Counselor* – conquered death for you by His bodily resurrection so that you can face death knowing that you have the hope of the resurrection of the body and eternal life in God’s love!

Now, we don’t rejoice in God’s wonderful counsel because it makes sense to our fallen human reason. We rejoice in God’s wonderful counsel because the Holy Spirit has given us faith to trust God’s Word even though His ways are not our ways.

The baby boy conceived in Mary’s womb was given the name Jesus because He is the eternal Son of God who would save us from our sins. But we don’t only call Him “Jesus.” We also call Him “Wonderful Counselor” – and we continue to be blessed by His wonderful counsel as we hear, read, study, believe, and trust His Word! Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +