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Introduction

I heard some song lyrics in the last few days declaring that “it’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas— everywhere we go.” Another song declared, “It’s that time of year when the world falls in love, every song you hear, seems to say, ‘Merry Christmas.’” Really? It doesn’t look like the world is falling in love. We don’t have to look overseas in Syria or the Middle East. All we have to do is look at what is happening on the streets of America, and it’s pretty easy to see that even though it’s Christ*mas*, there’s a real *mess* this time of year.

Even though Martha Stewart tells Americans how to best decorate the house for the holidays, as well as how to prepare the perfect Christmas dinner, there’s a lot going on behind the scenes that’s far from perfect. We send and receive those perfect looking Christmas card pictures, but not all of them are perfect. Some are pretty awkward – at best. (INSERT pictures/end with family) Christ*mas* sometimes looks and feels like Christ*mess*.

There’s a story behind those snap shots, and there are some snap shots in the Old Testament with a story behind them. This Christmas at The Creek, we’re going to do something different from what we have ever done in the past, and that is to look at the Christmas story from the perspective of Isaiah, a prophet in the Old Testament. We’re not going to spend time in the familiar passages of Luke and Matthew because there’s something rich to see about the birth of Jesus long before it happened, as told by Isaiah.

CONTEXT

Since we’re going to be in Isaiah all month, we need to look at the context of Isaiah so that we understand the content of what we read this Christmas season. It may be that you are not familiar with Isaiah. Then again, this Christianity-thing may be entirely new to you, so let me start “at the top” and quickly work our way down into the detail of the context.

- The Bible is made up of two parts, the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament describes life BEFORE Jesus came and the New Testament describes life WHILE Jesus was here on earth and after He died and rose from the dead.
- There are 66 books in the Bible; 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament, and that’s important to know because...
- Isaiah has 66 chapters. The first 39 chapters describe how the Israelites rejected God, of how decadent they were, and because of that destruction was coming. God, who is just, was going to bring judgment on His people as Babylon, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, would soon invade the country, destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. They would carry off as slaves into exile the people they did not kill. The first 39 chapters describe the great HURT of the people. They were in a *mess* of hurt.

- The last 27 chapters of Isaiah describe great HOPE. They do not describe the coming judgment of God; but rather, they describe the future coming of Jesus. The Messiah would come and bring to them victory.

Isaiah was a prophet, who stayed and spoke in Jerusalem for more than four decades. He spoke to four kings during those years when they reigned, and he had one continuing message to them: repent. Repent or be destroyed. God revealed to Isaiah what misery would soon come; but God also revealed to Isaiah what would happen later, and that being the coming of the Messiah. This book of the Old Testament makes more mention of the Messiah – of Jesus – than *any* other book in the Old Testament. Let's take a look at just some of the prophecies (bring up on screen). Some of the most vivid are of the crucifixion of Jesus.

- **Isaiah 50:6** I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.
- **Isaiah 53:4-5** 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 53:7** He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.
- **Isaiah 42:1-3** "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."

These are but a few of the dozens of "snapshots" of the Savior that we find in Isaiah. The death account of Jesus in Isaiah 53 appears in the past tense (i.e., He was *pierced* for our transgressions, He was *crushed* for our iniquities) and with such vivid detail it's as if the death of Jesus by crucifixion has *already* happened! Isaiah's details are so vivid, it's as if he was standing at the foot of the cross! Listen now. Isaiah wrote his prophecy 700 years before Jesus was born! That's seven centuries! That would be like Christopher Columbus being able to describe space travel to the moon and back in vivid detail while sailing across the ocean to discover America. Imagine George Washington stating at his own inauguration that Donald Trump would be inaugurated the 45th president of the United States, giving vivid details about the year and a half long contentious campaign. Imagine the shepherd boy David, who knew how to sling a stone and hit a giant of a man named Goliath; imagine him describing how to throw something called a baseball and the Cubs hitting the ball out of the park and winning something called the World Series! In vivid detail, Isaiah described the coming of the Messiah hundreds and hundreds of years before Jesus was born.

To that end, let's look carefully at just one of the "Christmas" snap shots Isaiah provides us. It's a very familiar verse ("snap shot").

Isaiah 9:6

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.

This was great news! This is now the third time in as many chapters (7:14, 8:3) that Isaiah mentioned the Messiah. Speaking on behalf of God, Isaiah told the people no less than three times that they would be delivered from the dark times (see 9:2). And clearly, the "child born" is no ordinary child! From commoner to the king, no Israelite has ever been called by these names. Why? This Child is the Child of God! We know because of the resemblance. Check this out.

Isaiah 28:29

All this also comes from the **Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel** and magnificent in wisdom. That sounds like the names given to the Child: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God.” Check this out.

Isaiah 10:21

A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the **Mighty God**.

There it is again! The Child was given a name that is the name of God, Himself! The Messiah would come and He would be the Son of God, bearing the names of God because He will have the very nature of God!

“And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God...” Think of just those two names for a moment. Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God. Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God. Take those two names and add them to Isaiah 7:14 where Jesus is called Immanuel, meaning “God with us,” then means that the Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God is with us. Why is that so important? It’s Christmas, but not every Christmas is picture-perfect. The house doesn’t look perfectly decorated this Christmas, and instead of preparing that perfect Christmas dinner ourselves, we’re going to buy one from Kroger or Meijer or Target.

Not every Christmas is picture-perfect. Someone we loved died this year. The divorce became final. The treatments aren’t working and someone we love is just getting weaker. The job ended—abruptly. The family is divided and more dysfunctional than ever. Depression is deep. Anxiety is crippling. Fear is more than real. Not every Christmas is picture-perfect. It’s more like Christ*mess*. That’s why we need our Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God.

Wonderful Counselor

Counselors speak. The same is true of our Wonderful Counselor, and when we are in the midst of a Christ*mess*, we need to hear a word from Him. God speaks, and has been from the beginning of measured time when He said, “Let there be light.” Being that God does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17), He still speaks. And not only does God, the Father, speak; but so also, does His Son—the Wonderful Counselor!

- “Wonderful” reveals that God speaks supernaturally.

He speaks, and the supernatural happens. The word “wonder” in Hebrew frequently refers to the impact created by a supernatural act of God. Our Wonderful Counselor is not only supernatural, but His words accomplish that which is supernatural. In Psalm 33, verses 6 and 9, we read: “By the *word* of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of His *mouth*. For He *spoke* and it came to be; He *commanded* and it stood firm.”

- “Counselor” reveals that God speaks specifically.

Counselors speak into our lives to offer help and direction, and so does God. Throughout the Bible, there is one instance after another of God speaking specifically into the lives of people. God told Moses to bring His people out of Egypt. He told Noah to build a boat, and make it a big one. God told Mary that she would have baby boy. Since the beginning of measured time, God has been speaking. Moreover, God can speak, He will speak, for He still speaks into your life and mine *specifically*. God in us is the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is even called the Counselor in the New Testament.

In the midst of this Christ*mess*, God—our Wonderful Counselor—supernaturally and specifically speaks to us. The question is, do we listen? Are we in a position to hear God speak into our lives? Back in 2002, the first Verizon cellphone commercial aired, and the guy would stand in one place after another, and ask the

person, "Can you hear me now?" Whether standing in a swamp or in downtown traffic, the person talking with the guy had trouble hearing him: Can you hear me now? Do we have trouble hearing God?

David Shelley, is a pastor serving in Greeley, Colorado (preachingtoday.com) and he said that he is an introvert—which is something about which I know nothing. He said, that as an introvert, his wife Lori would ask him a question, and she would not get an immediate response. For example, Dave said that he could be sitting at the table reading, and Lori would ask him if he wanted something to drink. She expects a simple answer, such as "tea, please." But, there's no response. Dave said that this is common behavior for him as an introvert. He is preoccupied with reading (or whatever the task is) and thinks nothing about responding. As an introvert, he said that there's already a conversation going on inside of him, and he is too preoccupied to hear what Lori said or asked of him.

When I heard this, I thought you and I don't need to be introverts to be preoccupied when someone tries to talk with us. An extrovert—especially someone who has a doctoral degree in multi-tasking—is preoccupied. So, whether we are introverts or extroverts, when God tries to speak to us, we are too preoccupied with ourselves to hear what He is saying in the moment. Since the beginning of measured time, God has been speaking—and being that God doesn't change like shifting shadows (James 1:17), He is still speaking to us and He wants to be heard. He has something to help to say about the *Christmess* in which we find ourselves, and how ignorant we are when we refuse to enter the conversation.

Mighty God

Not only do we need a timely word from the Lord, but we need our Mighty God! When we are in the midst of *Christmess*, He is Mighty God. When we are weak, we need His mighty power. When we are afraid and alone, we need His mighty presence.

- **Mighty Power**

In Isaiah 40:12, Isaiah attempted to describe what is beyond description, and that being the Person of God. "Who has measured the water of the earth in the hollow of His hand? We are told that at any given moment; in all of the oceans, seas, lakes, rivers and streams, there are 340 quintillion gallons of water! To try and understand the enormity of that number, it's the number 340 followed by eighteen zeros! God is so great that He holds that in the mere hollow of His hand! "Or with the breadth of His hand has marked off the heavens?" There are no estimates as to the expanse of space. Some great minds say the universe stretches some thirty billion light years across, yet God measures that with His hand alone! "Who holds the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?" The Earth weighs an estimated six sextillion metric tons! God Almighty holds it all as if in a balance! There is no known end to outer space. There are literally billions of galaxies and each galaxy has billions of stars within them, and yet God "brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name" (v. 26)! What indescribable power – too great to comprehend!

A few years ago, I remember hearing someone say that Rolls Royce doesn't publish the horsepower of their engines. So, I thought I would follow up on that and I looked up the phone number of the Rolls-Royce dealer in the area, and asked to speak with a salesperson. I told the person that I was interested in a Rolls-Royce Phantom, and asked a few questions about it—only to receive some reluctant answers. Then I asked what the horsepower is of the Rolls-Royce Phantom, and the person responded with: "Sufficient." Sufficient. Friend, God's mighty power is sufficient, more than enough for whatever *Christmess* we are enduring this year. Moreover, there's something else that Isaiah saw in God, and it was His...

- **Mighty Presence**

In Isaiah 43:1-3, we read something indescribable! Now some have said that this applies only to the Jews for God is speaking these promises to His people. Yes, the context of these promises is indeed to the people of God. But we do not want to forget that in Galatians 3:29, the Apostle Paul wrote: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." This statement refers to all of the spiritual promises given to Abraham, and those same spiritual promises are ours through Jesus Christ. (Read verses again) "I have redeemed you—by the blood of the Lamb, I have called you out of darkness and into my wonderful light! When you pass through the waters of affliction, I will be with you. When you walk through the fires of suffering, you will not be burned! Mighty God *is* Immanuel, God with us! In Joshua 1:9, we are told, "Do not be anxious. Do not be terrified. For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." In Zephaniah 3:17, we are told, "The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save." In Matthew 28: 20, Jesus tells us, "I will be with you always---even to the end of the age." In Hebrews 13:5-6, God tells us, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you."

If this is your first Christmas without someone who has passed from this life, you are not alone in your Christ*mess*. Immanuel, mighty God is with you! If you are alone this Christmas because someone has walked away from you, you are not alone in your Christ*mess*. Immanuel, mighty God is with you!

Hurricane Katrina brought about many changes, not only in New Orleans, but across the country. For example, the President of the U.S. now has the power to push text messages to just about every smartphone in America, anytime he deems it necessary. The Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system was a response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina—and Amber Alerts were birthed out of this new tech system. The President of the United States can mass-message our entire phone-carrying nation at the same time whenever he deems it necessary. But God can—and does something even better. Mighty God is in instantaneous and personal contact with every believer, at any time, under any circumstances, by his Spirit.

For many here, this Christmas may be far from perfect. Forget the perfect decorations, the perfect parties, the perfect gift—and gift wrapping, and more. It's not perfect. Come to think of it, it was never meant to be perfect. No matter *what* day of the year it is, it's not perfect because of sin. Every day is a Christ*mess*.

So what do we do? We wait. We wait just like Cub fans have waited! Good things happened while Cub fans waited for a trip to the World Series. Think with me. Radio and television were invented. Women won the right to vote. The NBA and the NFL were created. The Soviet Union came—and went. Eleven amendments were added to the US Constitution. Alaska, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Hawaii were added to the Union. The computer, the cell phone, digital photography, microwave ovens, remote controls, laser beams, super glue, Velcro and video games, GPS, ATM, the MRI, the MP3, the VCR, the DVD were all invented. While waiting for 108 years, Cub fans and the rest of America saw good things happen.

And those who "wait on the Lord, will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, run and not grow weary, walk and not be faint" (Is. 40:31). Those who wait on the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God *will* see good things happen while in the midst of a Christ*mess*.

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