

The Song of Isaiah

Prelude to Bethlehem – Part I

Isaiah 9:6

Introduction

I want to thank our church choir members and our musicians for all of their preparation and hard work on the Christmas music. It is incredible music! Thirteen years ago, when our church was new and small enough to meet in a middle school, we did not have a choir and orchestra. I often had to lead the singing and, according to the notes from that time, I lead the singing on that Christmas Sunday. We sang several different hymns and then, I played a cassette tape recording of a choir singing “Away in a Manger”. That was our special music that Christmas Sunday morning. Like I said, what incredible music we have enjoyed from our choir and musicians!

I personally do not think Christmas would be the same without music. Whether it is a trained orchestra and choir or a simple cassette tape, music that celebrates the incarnation is exceptional.

When you study the biblical accounts of Christ’s birth, you discover that music played an irresistible role in the gospel. In Luke’s Gospel alone, there are at least four hymns of praise that are related to the birth of Christ. There were songs about His coming birth; there were songs on the day of His birth, and there were songs soon after His birth.

It is still true today, no matter where you go in the world, wherever there is the gospel of God coming to earth, music is not far away. Music is the natural, predictable response to the news of redemption.

If you go back to the time when Moses and the children of Israel walked on dry land through the Red Sea, there is a musical response. When the Israelites safely arrived on the other side and the water closed

in on the Egyptian army, you can hear their melody of redemption. They stopped and sang a hymn to God that is recorded in Exodus, chapter 15. Look at some of the lyrics in verses 1b and 2a.

... I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him ...

Years later, King David compiled a hymnal which we still have today, through the preservation of scripture, called the Psalms. He wrote in chapter 40, verse 3a,

He [God] has put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God ...

In his New Testament letter to the believers in Ephesus, Paul commanded the church, in chapter 5, verse 19, to,

[speak] to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord

Even the angels were created with the ability to sing. In the book of Job, chapter 38, verse 7a, you discover,

... the morning stars sang together ...

Morning stars is a reference to the angels. They were singing together in praise to their creator God.

On the evening of Christ’s birth, the angels formed a massive choir and sang the very first announcement to that group of stunned shepherds. Luke, chapter 2, verse 13, records,

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God . . .

The sky was filled with angelic beings who began to praise God. The verb for “praising God” is a rare Greek word which comes from the verb “aineo”. It was used throughout the Greek Old Testament translation for the Hebrew word “hallel”. “Hallel” was a word that was often used to refer to praising God through song. When the verb was followed by poetic lines, it indicated that a hymn was being composed for singing.

The angels sang, according to verse 14a of Luke, chapter 2,

Glory to God in the highest . . .

The tense of the verb indicates that the angels sang this over and over again. Like the hallelujah’s of Handel’s *Messiah*, they sang it triumphantly. All the shepherds could do was stand there with their mouths open and their hearts thumping. The earth shook with the chorus of praise.

Music and the birth of Christ are inseparable. However, the singing did not start only after the baby’s birth. The angels were not the first to start singing. There was a prelude of music before Joseph and Mary ever arrived in Bethlehem.

The Song of Isaiah

One of the first hymns to be composed by a human heart, which was perhaps, the earliest poem, and which has been set to music for generations, was a song that was composed six hundred years before the birth of Christ. You can see the lyrics yourself. Turn to Isaiah, chapter 9, verse 6.

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah composed a verse in his hymn to describe who the coming Redeemer was.

Seven expressions for the Redeemer

Seven different expressions are chosen by Isaiah to describe the Redeemer. Let us take a look at them.

A child will be born

1. The first expression is, “a child will be born”.

This is a reference to the humanity of Jesus Christ. Jesus was fully God and, at the same time, fully human.

A son will be given

2. The second expression, “a son will be given,” speaks of existence prior to birth.

This is a reference to the deity of Jesus Christ. Jesus was fully human and, at the same time, fully divine.

He is called, in this verse, by Isaiah, “a son”. The Messiah was actually three kinds of a Son. He was called:

- the Son of Mary, which described His relationship with the human race;
- the Son of Man, which described His role as humanity’s Redeemer;
- the Son of God, which described His royalty as the second person of the Triune God.

He was the:

- Son of Mary, which is His merger with humanity;
- Son of Man, which is His mission among humanity;
- Son of God, which is His membership within the Trinity.

Isaiah sings,

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders . . .

I will talk about the next phrase in a minute. For now, let us skip to where Isaiah gives us the Redeemer’s name. What is the baby boy’s name?!

His name will be called Wonderful

3. The next expression gives us His name, . . . *and His name will be called Wonderful . . .*

This word “Wonderful,” is not an adjective, but a noun. It is not describing the next noun, which is “Counselor,” but should stand alone as one of Messiah’s names.

This is not the first time, by the way, that this thought appears. An angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah, in chapter 13 of the book of Judges, and announced that Manoah and his wife would have a

son, which they named Samson. Manoah asked the angel of the Lord what his name was. The angel of the Lord was in fact, a Christophany; that is, a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. The angel answered Samson's father by saying, in verse 18b,

. . . Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?

That is another way of saying, "incomprehensible". In other words, you cannot come up with an adequate name to describe Jesus Christ. He is simply, wonderful.

I have had young brides come to my office when planning their wedding ceremony. More than one of them have described their future husband, while gushing and sighing, with the words, "Well, I don't know what to say about him – he's just, wonderful!"

I think to myself, "Just give it a few months," or even a few days, in some cases. I have no doubt he will be sort of wonderful; he will be wonderful at times.

The other day, I went to my wife and said, "Happy anniversary, Honey."

We were married in July, so, since it is December, she was not sure what I meant. I said, "It was on December 7, 1977, that we had our first date. So, happy anniversary!"

She smiled and looked at me in such a way that I knew, I had just done something wonderful . . . and it was about time!

Did you notice that Isaiah is not telling us what Jesus will do, even though He will do wonderful things? No, Isaiah is telling us who Jesus is.

This One is altogether, consistently, unchangeably, incomprehensibly, wonderful! And, the more you get to know Him; the more you live with Him, the more wonderful He becomes.

His name will be called Counselor

4. Isaiah goes on to compose, in this prelude to Bethlehem, another description of the coming Redeemer, which is,

. . . and His name will be called . . . Counselor . . .

People are in desperate need of good council. They go everywhere for advice, but to Him. They go elsewhere, even though He has never given bad advice; even though He is never wrong.

He is the infallible Counselor. He has never had to say to someone, "Sorry about that, I gave you the

wrong advice. I didn't know the other side of the story . . . I should have thought a little longer before I gave you My counsel."

No, this Counselor never has to say that. In fact:

- whenever He speaks, it is truth;
- whatever He advises, it is insightful;
- whatever He reveals, it is discerning;
- whenever He commands, it is perfect.

Go to Him!

Jesus Christ, the Counselor, has never once had to amend His words or modify His counsel; He has never reversed, adjusted, or altered His guidance.

Go to Him!

William Jennings wrote, nearly a hundred years ago,

*Can we do anything other than fall at His feet and cry adoringly, "In Thy fathomless wisdom Thou art well named Counselor."*ⁱ

One thing that we all have in common is that we are in need of good advice about something. We try to go to people for advice that we assume do not need advice about the same issue, right?!

Imagine me taking my pickup truck to a mechanic and saying, "Listen, I've got this rumbling noise. I'm not talking about the muffler, that's been loose for three months and I'm ignoring it, it's something different. Listen."

We go to my truck, start it up, raise the hood, put our heads underneath, and he says, "I hear it too."

"Great!" I exclaim.

The first step to getting your automobile fixed, and often the hardest step, is for it to mess up in front of the mechanic!

He says, "I hear it!"

However, what if he were to say, "You know, Stephen, my truck's been doing the same thing. C'mon over here and listen."

He then fires up his truck, raises the hood and, indeed, his truck is making the same rumbling sound. He says, "I can't figure it out. What do you think the problem is?"

"I do not know what the problem is. I am the one with the problem and I came to you to fix it!"

Do you think I would leave my truck in his hands? Not on your life. If he cannot fix his own truck, he surely cannot fix mine!

Imagine going to a Christian counselor about a difficulty in your marriage and, before you get started, he says, "Listen, before we get to your marriage problems, I've got a problem in my relationship with my wife that I need your advice on. Let me tell you about it."

Would you be interested in going to a counselor who has your problem and cannot seem to fix it?

Jesus Christ is the only Counselor you will ever go to who will never need your advice. Isn't that a wonderful thought!

Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 11, verse 34,
For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?

Jesus is:

- infinitely wise, so He already knows all the details;
- omnipresent, so He knows all the extenuating circumstances and conditions;
- omniscient, so He knows your need, your heart, your desires, your sin, your difficulty and your own contribution to the problem, and everything else about your situation;
- omnipotent, so He not only gives perfect counsel, but He empowers the counselee to be able to obey His advice. Human counsel cannot empower. Divine counsel can, not only counsel, but empower you to apply the remedy.

He is Wonderful. He is Counselor.

His name will be called Mighty God

5. The next expression that Isaiah adds to his song is,

. . . and His name will be called . . . Mighty God . . .

Ladies and gentlemen, this is one of the clearest, most powerful statements of Jesus Christ's deity that you will find anywhere in the Bible.

"El Gibbor," the Hebrew for "Mighty God," was a traditional name for God. Moses used it (Deuteronomy 10:17); Jeremiah used it (32:18); Nehemiah used it (9:32); and David also referred to God by His name, "El Gibbor," or "Mighty God" (Psalm 24:8).

However, the liberals and the Christ deniers know their backs are against the proverbial wall. So, they will say, "No, no, let's translate it, 'Hero of

strength'. This will, in effect, dilute the statement of deity and say it could belong to anyone of heroic stature."

So, turn to the next chapter, chapter 10, in Isaiah's prophecy and read where the exact same Hebrew name is applied to the God of Israel. Look at verses 20 and 21.

Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

This baby that is about to be born; this Son who will walk on the earth, happens to be almighty God! He is:

- not just a gracious teacher, but almighty God;
- not just a moral man, but almighty God;
- not just a good example, but almighty God!

His name will be called Eternal Father

6. Isaiah then adds another descriptive name to his list of Wonderful, Counselor, and Mighty God. The next expression of His name is,
. . . And His name will be called . . . Eternal Father . . .

The word "Father," in this verse, is used in reference not to His position in the Trinity, but to His authority. Literally, He is the Father of eternity. Even more bluntly, you could render this name, "Originator of eternity".

This phrase is used in John, chapter 8, verse 44, when Jesus told his audience that Satan was the "father of lies". He meant that Satan was the original liar. Satan is the father of, or the originator and dispenser of, lies.

Jesus went on to say,

. . . Whenever he [Satan] speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature [his own native language] . . .

In other words, lying is not only Satan's natural domain, it is his specialty.

The domain of Jesus Christ is eternity; His specialty is everlasting life.

Isaiah was saying that the Messiah would be the originator and dispenser of eternal life, when he said, "His name will be called Eternal Father."

His name will be called Prince of Peace

7. He is, finally, the Prince of Peace.

*. . . And His name will be called . . .
Prince of Peace.*

Understand that this particular name is highly prophetic, even today. The birth of Christ did not bring peace to planet earth. From His birth until now, the earth has been filled with war and conflict.

This name refers to the time when Christ will mount the throne of David and rule the world at His second coming. That kingdom will last a thousand years, according to Revelation, chapter 20, and will empty into a new heaven and a new earth where Christ will rule forever. As:

- the Son of Mary, the descendant of David, Christ will rule over Israel;
- the Son of Man, Christ will rule over the whole earth;
- the Son of God, Christ will rule eternally over heaven and the entire universe.

He is the Prince . . . and His everlasting Kingdom will be one of perfect Peace.

One action for the Redeemer

Now, Isaiah has sung a song about our Messiah. He included seven things that He is. Tucked away in this hymn as well, is one thing that He will do.

Go back to the first part of verse 6 and read the lyrics,

. . . and the government will rest on His shoulders . . .

You cannot understand this phrase unless you travel back in time to the wedding ceremony of a Jewish couple during the days of Christ.

Following the year long betrothal period, when the man has prepared a home for his bride, a procession begins to form. The journey begins at the home of the groom's father, where traditionally, a room has been added for the bride and groom to live. The groom sets off for the home of his bride. All the neighbors turn out for the procession. There is singing and laughing. Relatives come from all over and, with joy and singing, they jam the narrow streets.

The procession arrives at the bride's home and she comes out, dressed as a queen, wearing the finest clothing affordable. Then, the bride and groom begin the journey back to the father's house. Sometime during that journey, she would remove the veil from her face and lay it upon his shoulder. The crowd would begin to chant a song that included words about her submission to the authority of her husband. Literally, her life was now resting on the strength of his shoulder.

In the same way, to this One, our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace we, the bride, have given the veil of our hearts and our lives. And, we have said, "Lord, the government; the leadership; the authority of our lives is now resting entirely upon the strength of Your omnipotent shoulder. We place upon Your shoulder, the veil of our dreams, our wishes, and our wills."

In so doing, we discover some of the depth of Isaiah's song; some of the richness of His lyrics. We find that we have surrendered to One who is indeed:

- Wonderful
- Counselor
- Mighty God
- Eternal Father
- Prince of Peace.

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¹ F. C. Jennings, *Studies in Isaiah* (Neptune, NJ, Loizeaux Brothers, 1935), p. 117.