

Reverend Derek White - Sermon: “Unto Us a Child is Born”

Scripture: Isaiah 9:1-7

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan –

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, 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. 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.

INTRODUCTION

One of my favorite parts of the Christmas Season is watching the Charlie Brown Christmas Special and the part where Linus reads the passage from Isaiah 9 as the prophecy of who Jesus is.

Because of that one scene in that Christmas Special people all over the world know this passage of scripture that tells the birth of Jesus. He shall be called “Wonderful Counselor”, “Mighty God”, “Everlasting Father”, “Prince of Peace”. And at the end of the show Linus turns to his friend Charlie Brown and says, “and that is what Christmas is all about Charlie Brown”.

This animated cartoon of the Peanuts Gang is a Christmas classic every year. It has become one of those traditions that people look forward to as a Christmas tradition.

PART ONE: What is in a Name?

As we celebrate Christmas together, we rejoice at the coming of Christ. He is the one that we have learned through our Advent journey is the one worth waiting for. He is the one who give hope, faith, joy, love, and peace to the world.

The names we share with people creates a bond of connectedness. And depending upon the dynamics of the relationship and knowledge of a person names can either be of importance or get in the way.

For example, I often get asked what do I go by. I know this usually is because people want to know what my title is. Am I Deacon, Pastor, Reverend, Reverend Doctor, The Very Reverend, Father, Chaplain, Captain, etc.? And my response when I am asked these questions usually is, it depends on what the person needs.

For example, if someone came to me in distress and needed to talk, I am a Chaplain. If I am needed at the hospital to visit someone, I usually let the reception staff at the hospital know I am a Pastor to see the person if it is outside of visiting hours. If I am needed to officiate a wedding I usually identify as the Reverend. If I call the town to have the street for the church plowed on a Sunday morning and the person answering the phone calls me Father, I just go with it – I know how well Catholic guilt works. That did happen once.

Titles sometimes matter depending on the need. Today things are much less formal when it comes to titles. Jesus when he was born had many names and titles. For centuries, the people had waited for this child to be born. He is the “Son of Man”, the “Good Shepherd”, the “Messiah”, the “Christ”, the “Son of God”, our “Emmanuel”, the “Word made Flesh”, the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”. He is the “Wonderful Counselor” and the “Prince of Peace”. Jesus is for us what humanity needs from God. His many titles give him authority. Yet at the same time he is also Jesus, a guy who would sit with people on the side of the road and break bread with them. He is not just someone with many titles, he is a person like you and me. In him and through him we are able to connect with God.

PART TWO: The Dangers of Being King

Last week I shared how after his birth he had to go into exile because King Herod saw him as a threat. If Jesus was born in Bethlehem as a descendant of David and the Wisemen traveled because a star told them a new king was born. Jesus is not the son of Herod so he instantly became a threat to the house of Herod.

Actually, any child born in Bethlehem would have had a connection to the royal blood line of David. But guess who was not born in Bethlehem? Herod was not born in Bethlehem nor was his son. It says in Isaiah that a child will be born who will sit on David’s royal throne and uphold justice and righteousness for all time, forever and forever. It also says in Isaiah that Galilee would be honored through him.

Because of the title given to Jesus when he is born, he instantly begins to challenge the status quo. As a baby Jesus wasn't a threat to King Herod. But Jesus as a newborn King was a huge threat to King Herod. From birth Jesus starts with the authority of God to challenge earthly kingdoms. Even though he comes from humble birth in a stable, he is destined because of who he is to change the world.

PART THREE: Advent Study

During Advent we had a devotional study that looked at the names of Jesus. We used the devotional book "Unwrapping the Names of Jesus". And I have to say it was a lot of fun leading the study each week as we went through the season of Advent together. We went into a lot of depth in understanding who Jesus is.

We talked about Jesus being the High Priest like Melchizedek, a King and Priest. We looked at Jesus as the Bread of Life. We looked at Jesus as the Lion of Judah, the Alpha and Omega. There were over twenty different names and titles for Jesus that we explored in understanding who Jesus is. Years ago in college I had a beautiful picture that was in the shape of the cross and it had over a thousand names written in small font that were names of Jesus. I wish I could relocate that artwork with the names of Jesus.

To think there are over a thousand ways to describe Jesus to someone shows the importance of who Jesus is. But because he is so well known, we only need to say the name of Jesus and it is universally understood in every part of the world. We could be speaking to someone who speaks a completely different language than us and only say the name of Jesus and there would be instant connection. He is the Prince of Peace.

Conclusion

Back to where we began. Charlie Brown and the Peanut Gang. With all the distractions in the world, what is the meaning of Christmas. And Linus gets up on the stage and tells the story of Jesus. Everyone stops what they are doing for a moment to connect with the reading of the prophecy from Isaiah and the birth story from the Gospel of Luke. It is about a child born in Bethlehem, a man from Nazareth, the Son of the Living God, our Emmanuel, Jesus the Christ who brings us together.

Jesus is the one who gives us the hope for new beginnings. As we begin this new year let us rejoice in the one who gives us new life.

