

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Baby Names: As He’s Known Round Here”

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December 24, 2020

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:1-20;

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with

justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:6-7;

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1:15-20

I need to talk to you about Axe body spray. Some of you need it. Nah I'm joking. Really I don't mean to pick on anyone who might happen to wear Axe body spray. Just think it's funny the way it's referenced: I suppose it, like any other scent or cologne, could be just fine in small doses. I just do find it a bit funny the way it's referenced: this over-powerful, almost comically strong scent that's applied way too liberally. Here's one way it's been described.

“Meant to split the difference between deodorant and cologne, Axe bulldozed the senses with a fragrance so strong it seemed to precede the bodies it clung to—like Febreeze, or a bad reputation.” Here's another: “An extremely dangerous chemical weapon worse than mustard gas.”

Now I know what you're thinking. Where can I get me some of that? Well, if you go to your local fumigation service, I mean grocery store, you just look for the canisters that say “Axe” in big bold letters on them. But, and I know this was a concern of yours, what if you happen to be in, say, the UK or Ireland or Australia or China, and you realize “Oh no! I'm out of Axe body spray”? Well, you'd be in a bind, because you wouldn't be able to find it. Not because it's banned there, but because it's known there by another name: Lynx body spray. Aren't you glad you know that now?

As it turns out Axe isn't the only name brand that's different in other places. Familiar names like Diet Coke, Lay's Potato Chips, or Kentucky Fried Chicken are all known differently depending on where you go.

Maybe more seasonal, even a figure like Santa Claus has a lot of different names. Father Christmas in the UK, Dedt Moroz in Russia, or Jultomten in Sweden? Different names depending on where you go. Sometimes it's not just the name that's different, but the entire association with it. You go to Finland, you might hear about someone named Joulupukki, who nowadays is depicted as someone like who we think of as Santa Claus, but originally was the evil goat thing who made

kids behave. There, a visit from Joulupukki might not be thought of as such a good thing. Different names depending on where you are and who you talk to.

If you've been with us at all these past few weeks in Advent, you'll know we've been talking a lot about names. In particular, four names out of Isaiah chapter nine that were given for this expected child who would deliver the people of God. We heard them a moment ago: "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." And those names mean different things depending on where you are and who you talk to. If you talked to the Jews living in exile back then, those names meant a king, a leader who would restore their nation. Obviously if you talk to folks around here in our church or to Christians over the centuries, we say those names point to Jesus.

But even saying that name, Jesus, especially on a day like today, means different things, depending on who you talk to.

What does that name mean to you? It's an honest question. This is a church, so one would guess that for some of us here the name Jesus means something good: "Savior," "Redeemer," something like that. But that's not true for everyone. Maybe you're here and the name Jesus used to mean something to you, but now, it's more just something from your past, and really you're just here to indulge a family member at the holidays. No judgment about that; it's just reality. Or maybe Jesus is a name that used to be something very powerful for you, but then you were hurt by someone who claimed to follow him, and by association just the name Jesus can bring up all that pain again. Or maybe Jesus is a name that honestly you just don't know what all the fuss is about. You never have, and you don't think you ever will.

Whatever the case in those instances, if you're honest, there's a gap between how Jesus is spoken of and how you feel about him in your heart. For some of us that gap is pretty dang big, and we feel it especially at Christmas, whether it be the name Jesus or any of his other aliases like "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Funny thing about those four names in Isaiah. The past four weeks we've been looking at them as four separate names, four separate titles, looking at one each Sunday. But there's decent enough reason to consider all one big name, not four separate ones. Reason for that is because Isaiah, at times, likes long names. Just a bit earlier, in chapter eight, Isaiah offers a name for another child, a different child as "Maher-shalal-hash-baz," which on a name tag would be, "Hello my name is 'He has made haste to the plunder.'" Bit of mouthful, that one.

Point is, good reason to think that these four titles "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" aren't actually four names but one big one, like a package deal. You say one, you say them all.

It's like this. You ever seen the movie *The Sandlot*? Growing up, baseball movie. It's set in the 60s, and looming large in this movie is the spirit of Babe Ruth. New kid moves to town and tries to befriend some of the other kids who play baseball in the neighborhood sandlot, but he doesn't really know anything about baseball or Babe Ruth or anything. So one day, the kids are

talking, and someone mentions “The Great Bambino,” one of Babe Ruth’s nicknames, and the new kid asks, “Who’s that?” They all look at him with shock. “The Great Bambino?” one of them says. “The Sultan of Swat?” another chimes in. “The Titan of Terror?” “The Colossus of Clout?” “The King of Crash?” And it seemed that whenever Babe Ruth got mentioned, all those names would come with it. Babe Ruth? The Great Bambino, the Sultan of Swat, the Colossus of Clout, the Titan of Terror, the King of Crash. All might as well be one name. It was a package deal. You say one, you say them all.

That’s what these four names in Isaiah might actually be. A package deal. “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” You say one, you say them all. Even hints of the Trinity in there: Counselor (another name for the Holy Spirit), Father, Prince (a royal son, literally).

What does all this have to do with anything, you might be wondering. This is what: it’s not like Jesus has four separate roles of Counselor or God or Father or Prince. It’s all together. There’s a singularity to these names, to these ways that Jesus is known, and it all points to who he is, what he has done, and what he is doing.

One of the most astounding and exclusive claims of the Christian faith is that Jesus of Nazareth, in all that he taught, all that he did, in his death and in his resurrection, that Jesus, this man of flesh and blood, was God himself. God Incarnate. Boggles the mind when you think about it. This is how Paul describes it in Colossians. That the eternal God, the one through whom, “all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible,” the one in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” was for a time in Judea 2,000 years ago that guy standing over there. It’s an amazing thing to say. The central miracle of all history, as C. S. Lewis would describe it.

What does that have to do with anything? Why does that matter? This is why. What Paul says next: “Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

This is the good news of Christmas: that it was the singular will, the package deal, the summation of all the names of deliverance in Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, the singular will of the Lord God Almighty to take on flesh, to walk among us, to sweat and cry and bleed, and to do so he crossed the unimaginable divide between heaven and earth, between eternal and temporal, between holy and human, and why? To be with you, to redeem you, to reconcile you, to bring peace. That’s who he is. That’s how he’s revealed himself. That’s how he’s made himself known.

But how do you know him? For some of us, for any number of reasons, we don’t know him like that. Whether it be that the indifference we have is too comfortable, or that the pain we’ve endured is too hard, for some us, we don’t know him like that. For some of us there is still that great distance between how Jesus is spoken of around Christmas and how we know him.

But no matter how distant this Jesus feels to you, it is nothing compared to the distance that God has already crossed for you. That is the divide that our God has overcome to redeem us. That is the gap that through the cross he has closed, and he walked into the darkness, into hardship, into death itself that you might have life.

That's who he is. That's what all those names point to.

On the day he was born, there were some for whom he was of little to no consequence. For everybody staying at the inn that had filled up, Jesus was just a baby born over to side, out of sight, out of mind, if they even knew about him at all. They probably didn't call him anything. For others, for folks like Herod, they saw the danger he posed in who he could be and who he could become, so they called him a threat. But then there were those, a blessed few, who heard the angels singing in the fields the night he was born, and in the darkness, they sought him out and called him Savior.

What will you call him?

In the name of the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Amen.