

A CHILD IS BORN, A SON IS GIVEN

(Isaiah 9.1-7)

Introduction

Seven years ago, Kathie and I got a phone call from our son to tell us the news that he had become a dad. We logged onto Facebook and saw the pictures of our first grandchild. We studied the photos carefully, and decided our granddaughter had the best possible start in life – she looked absolutely nothing like me!

The announcement of the birth of a new baby is guaranteed to spread a bit of cheer. Two of the best known prophecies in Isaiah both feature in Handel's *Messiah* and are birth announcements. We looked at the "Immanuel" prophecy two weeks ago, but today we're going to focus on chapter 9 which says: "To us a child is born, to us a son is given."

Isn't December a gloomy sort of month? Every shop has got Slade playing on a wearisome loop over the PA. England's cricket team is getting humiliated by the Aussies. It's cold. It's wet. It's dark...

But in the middle of all that darkness, there are lights decorating our homes and streets. There are evergreen trees decorated with tinsel. There's the smell of scented candles and mulled wine.

The backcloth to Isaiah's prophecy is a once great nation with an empire called Judah (shaded in red below), now diminished and in acute decline, torn apart by civil



war, squeezed by powers around it, including the growing superpowers of Assyria and Babylon which would eventually smash it into oblivion.

Judah at that time was ruled by a weak and corrupt king called Ahaz. He had abandoned the living God, and embraced superstitions and idols. He bowed down to the stars. He even sacrificed his son as an offering to the pagan god Molech. Like December in north-east England, Isaiah's Judah was a dark and gloomy place.

But out of nowhere he says,

"There will be no more gloom" (v1).

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light, and on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (v2).

"To us a child is born, to us a son is given (v6).

"Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end" (v7).

There's going to be a royal baby; a boy.

I predicted that our first child would be a boy. We had a little girl. Then I confidently predicted that our next three would all be girls. All were boys.

Predicting the sex of a child is not that hard; there's a 50% chance of getting it right – unless you're me. Then there's a 100% chance of being wrong.

He also says where the child is going to be from (v1). It says God "will honour Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea." That's where the light will shine.

In other words, *in the north*. Nothing good ever happened in the north. No one important came from the north. The engine of the economy and the centre of power were down south. But Isaiah says, "Well, all that's changing."

The thing is this. At the same time that Isaiah was speaking, there was another prophet called Micah. And Micah was saying "Look, there's going to be a new baby, a great ruler, and he will be from – guess where? - *the south*, in Bethlehem, about 80 miles south of Galilee.

You see how the Bible 'contradicts itself'? Was Jesus from the north or the south? Well, he did grow up and minister in Galilee as the New Testament clearly says. Jesus of Nazareth.

But he was born in Bethlehem, as the New Testament also clearly says and it tells us how God arranged an astronomical marvel, a new Roman poll tax, and an international census to get his heavily pregnant mum to the right place at the right time so his prophetic word would be fulfilled in exact and precise detail.

God watches over his word. He is careful to honour every promise in his word to you and he *will do* what he has said he will do, no more, no less.

He *will* be with you wherever you go, and will *not* forsake you. He will *not* let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. He will not allow anything to separate you from his love. His promises to you have the copper-bottomed guarantee of Jesus Christ his Son.

Don't let appearances to the contrary let you lose your focus. Is it north? Is it south? *God knows what he is talking about*, and you can trust... his... word.

He doesn't mention *when* the child will be born – which is just as well. People would be saying, "Oh great, a royal baby. When's it due? August? September?" Isaiah didn't know when it would happen. If he did know, he would have to say, "A bit later than September – it's going to happen in about 700 years' time."

And he gives no name for this new king who's going to come as a light and change the gloomy spiritual atmosphere. But Jesus has about 200 titles, more than any other figure in history, and you find four of them here in v6.

1. Wonderful Counsellor

Firstly, Wonderful Counsellor. Looking back over 2017, what a year it's been. We have

- a non-stop conflict zone across the Middle-East
- a lunatic firing off ballistic missiles over the Sea of Japan
- the most powerful man on earth behaving like an internet troll
- a dispersed and increased threat of Islamist terrorism
- modern piracy
- modern slavery
- mass shootings
- civil unrest
- vast refugee movements
- polluted oceans
- global warming
- ... and that's just the headlines.

We are undoubtedly living in a world of increased stresses and strains. Our world leaders don't know *what* to do. These are impossible situations.

We know that in life's most difficult, most complex situations we need wisdom and expertise.

It's why mountaineers look for local guides.
It's why government ministers have advisers.
It's why the Queen has a Privy Council.
It's why big business hires consultants.
It's why leaders look for mentors.
It's why sportsmen and women need coaches.

It's why we have:

- trauma counsellors
- marriage guidance counsellors
- hospital counsellors
- career counsellors
- bereavement and divorce counsellors
- post-natal counsellors...

Counsellors listen, encourage and show understanding, but they also help their clients to see their issues more clearly or in a different way.

The world needs wise counsel. Someone who can solve problems. Someone who brings clarity and light.

Jesus was constantly presented with impossible conundrums. How often did he say, "Err, I'll think about that and get back to you"? Or "I need to consult with my lawyers before I can give a reply"? Jesus always diagnosed the problem, knew what to do about it, and said it in plain language.

If you know Jesus personally you know from experience that he is a supernatural source of breath-taking wisdom. The more you lay your life before him in prayer, the more light you see.

2. Mighty God

Secondly, Mighty God. With the problems our world brings on itself, the leader we need is not just one who knows what to do, but who actually *delivers*. We need someone who can do the impossible.

Every generation is blighted by tyrants who say they can do the impossible, and think they're the great I AM; Saddam Hussein, Colonel Ghaddafi, Kim Jong Un, Robert Mugabe....

They all set themselves up as above criticism, and accountable to no one. But they all come to nought. But this child is going to be called "Mighty God."

He will turn water into wine, he will calm storms with a word, he will cleanse lepers, he will feed 5,000 people with a child's picnic, he will open blind eyes, he will set the lame dancing, he will walk on water and even raise the dead. He *is* the Great I AM.

There is no greater power in the universe than the might and dominion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Mighty God!

3. Everlasting Father

Thirdly, Everlasting Father. Jesus said, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." He said, "Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father." He said, "I will not leave you orphans."

Sadly, not all of us have a good mental image of God because our experience of earthly fatherhood is so deficient.

But Jesus loves you as a good father delights in his child; His commitment towards you is steadfast, immovable, unwavering and enduring. You are treasured. He already knows the worst about you, and still loves you.

Good fathers protect and he provide. Like Jesus. He is your strength and shield, you are utterly secure in him.

Good fathers teach and train their children. Like Jesus. His word is in you and, as you follow him, he instructs you in the way you should go.

One of the happiest moments of my life was when I was about 5 years old. I got lost on Chalkwell beach. Have you ever been lost as a child? It's terrifying! I wandered up and down the beach crying, scared, looking desperately for my family. And then there he was, my dad, oh the relief!

But our earthly fathers all die; we write touching eulogies, we carry their coffins in and out of church, we say goodbye, we shed a tear and miss them.

But Jesus is the *everlasting* father. Long before you were conceived he was a father to you, and long after you've gone, he will still be there for you.

4. Prince of Peace

And fourthly, he is the Prince of Peace.

One evening, Jesus said to his closest friends, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives."

The world offers one sort of peace. As one wit put it, the peace that the world gives is that lovely moment when everyone reloads their rifles.

But Jesus inspires peace even between bitter enemies. The unofficial World War 1 truce in No-Man's-Land between German and British troops broke out when both sets of soldiers began to sing Christmas carols.



For a brief moment, when they turned their hearts to Jesus, they were empowered to put their weapons down, shake hands, play football (which obviously Germany won on penalties) and exchange gifts. This is what happens when the Prince of Peace is allowed to reign.

He can settle every war, resolve every conflict, restore every stormy marriage, mend every broken family, and heal every torn community. He is the Prince of Peace.

Ending

At the first Christmas a child was born and a Son was given.

But the government is not yet upon his shoulders. That is still to come, when he returns to reign and every knee will bow before him and every tongue will confess that he is Lord.

But wherever he is invited to reign his kingdom comes.

Do you need wisdom today? Are you lost and confused? Do you not know where to turn? Do you need to hear the voice of Wonderful Counsellor whose word brings light? His name is Jesus, and he is here.

Do you need a touch of heavenly power today? Do you need a miracle? Are you desperate for a breakthrough? Do you need Mighty God to stretch out his arm and bring salvation and deliverance? His name is Jesus, and he is here.

Are you afraid, like a lost child, today? Do you need the reassurance of a loving, protecting, caring, strong, wise father who will never leave, nor forsake you? Do you need to feel the embrace of Everlasting Father? His name is Jesus, and he is here.

Or is your life in turmoil today? Is there a torn relationship with a colleague, a parent, a husband, a wife, a child, a neighbour, a friend? Do you need to make the first move and bring in the reign of the Prince of Peace? His name is Jesus, and he is here.

Let's pray...