

## A Name Above All Names

*"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,"* (Isaiah 9:6).

"What's in a name?" That's what Shakespeare wanted to know. "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," he said. The famous Bard of Avon, who rarely lacked for the right word, concluded that some things - like roses - simply outshine their names. Two thousand years before Shakespeare sniffed his first perennial, the prophet Isaiah had the same dilemma. He concluded that no name - or series of names - could do justice to that of the coming Savior.

*"To us a Child is born, to us a Son is given,"* he wrote. *"And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* Sometimes one name just isn't adequate. Names to the Hebrew people were a vital element of their life and culture. A person's name was more like a bio-sheet than an ID - more a resume than a monogram. And therefore, the naming of a child was a serious matter. The Jews prided themselves in attaching special significance to the naming process, and each name for a specific reason.

And, to make the occasion even more memorable, a party was often held to announce the newborn's name. The crowning moment came with the words, "He shall be called ...." Parents hoped that their child's name would be parlayed into value, honor, and distinction. King Solomon validated that goal when he wrote, *"A good name is to be desired more than great riches,"* (Proverbs 22:1). Rarely was a Jewish name given without a story line or a significance of some kind. The Jews felt that a name, like a good photo album, should tell a lot about a person. It served as a "verbal tattoo," so to speak.

For example, some Jewish names carried marketing brands, such as John the Baptizer, or Nehemiah the King's Cupbearer. Some names included family disclaimers, as with Hosea's illegitimate son Lo-Ammi, which means, "One not belonging to me." Some names carried promises, like Abraham ("The father of a multitude") and Sarah ("The princess of nations"). While other names dramatized difficult births, as with Naomi's two sons ("Sickly" and "Wasting Away"). Names were designed to be special or revealing, or both.

So it comes as no surprise that Isaiah (whose own name means "Jehovah is my Helper" foretold the Messiah's birth by starting with the Savior's name .... four of them, in fact. He is *"Wonderful Counselor"* No question ever perplexed him. No riddle could stump him. But his counsel included more than mere words. It offered compassion that was felt, and muscle that could act. His omniscience never drew a blank. His focus never wavered.

Furthermore, he is *"Mighty God"* He could create a universe from nothing, and sustain its zillions of cosmic systems with his almighty power. Yet as profound as the creation was, his most impressive act was the redemption of the wayward and rebellious human race. Then too, he is *"Everlasting Father,"* which is also translated "Father of Eternity." This name contrasts the Babe of Bethlehem's manger with the Christ for all ages. His kingdom encompasses all. His reign has no end. His sovereignty is unlimited. And finally, he is *"Prince of Peace,"* both outwardly and inwardly, of country and conscience, through time and eternity. His healing balm is all-inclusive. Not only is he the Prince of Peace, but, as the Apostle Paul said, *"He himself is our peace,"* (Ephesians 2:14).

To those of us who have been commissioned to declare his name, our mandate is simple - we're to call upon the name, speak in the name, praise the name, bless the name, serve in the name, crush our enemies by the name, and walk in the name of the Lord. No wonder his name is above all names. No wonder it's at his name that *"every knee shall bow, and every tongue will confess,"* (Philippians 2:10,11). No wonder the forces of darkness shudder at the mention of his name. No wonder *"there's no other name under heaven ... by which we must be saved,"* (Acts 4:12). The only wonder is that you and I have been given the high honor to proclaim this most holy name, and to tell the ageless story of his birth, death, and resurrection. Now that's a wonder, isn't it! Merry Christmas!

Blessed by the love of Jesus, Pastor Terry

