

The wondrous gift

Isaiah 9:6,7

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Dear Christian friends,

Who among you can truly claim to have experienced the fullness of the gift which God presented to all men in the Advent of our King? Who can comprehend the meaning of this truth: that Christ Jesus, our Lord has come? Our human experience cannot prepare us for this, for the gift of Christ is completely unique. There is no gift in all of time and eternity, like the gift of Christ Jesus. His worth is so vast that it is immeasurable, so exalted that no man can fully comprehend it. To men, it seems neither real, nor possible. Even Christians are seldom conscious of it. God's love in Christ, and Christ Himself is yours, but He is also always there. The truth of His Advent never changes. Familiarity may not breed contempt, but men have short attention spans, and the familiar, however much appreciated often goes unnoticed. How quickly does the wonder of our Lord's coming pass when Christmas turns into mere repetition, just another recitation of the story which we now mostly know by heart. How quickly we lose the utter joy and reverence that the Advent of our Lord deserves.

The words of Isaiah in our lesson are as familiar as the Christmas story itself, yet they are also the antidote to Christmas complaisance. And though you may know these words by heart, you have only to think about the meaning of these simple yet exalted words, to experience anew the wondrous promise which they impart unto you. Thy myth and magic of all the stories which men have ever told cannot match the wonder of the true story of God made flesh, come down to earth to bring salvation and peace to all mankind. No fantasy can compare. No drama is its equal. No mystery so intriguing.

It begins with the gift of a child, and not just any child, but David's royal heir. There is certainly nothing unusual about the birth of a descendent of King David, for he had many descendants, many of whom sat upon the throne in Judah. But for Israel and for us, the throne of David was like a dead stump. There was no king of David's line on any throne in Israel, and had not been for a long long time. In that, the promise of God seemed

to be broken. Yet Isaiah broadcasts this ray of hope, and describes a King of David's line, and yet, no ruler was ever described like this!

First, this child is born not just to rule, but is born *unto us*. He is a Son given *unto us*. He would be a man of the people, born as one of them, and known by them. He would not be some unknowable and unapproachable creature, no magnificent angel-like spirit. He would be a child, a son. Yet this alone does not make Him remarkable, were it not for the names which this Child bears. This prophecy ascribes to Him an honor and glory that defies reason, and yet first and last He shall be a man, of lowly birth. He would come to us as a humble child, born into the world just like any one of us.

But though he comes to us as a child, in such a humble form, His nature is unlike any man who ever lived. From the very beginning, the government is upon His shoulder. This would not in itself seem so strange, for David also began his life as nothing but a shepherd boy. Yet the government, or rather, the dominion here described is not the rule of this or that little nation. This Child would not be another Solomon, or even another Caesar. His government would be *the* government. *The* dominion (הַמְּשָׁרָה). He would be the ruler of *everything*. His kingdom embraces all of creation. What child born to human parents could ever inherit such a kingdom? No normal human child, no matter his parentage, could claim to be the rightful heir to the universe, yet this child is Lord of all. His kingdom is His by right, for He is the mighty God who created all things.

Who could equal this gift from heaven? Who could be greater than Him? Romans 11:34 says, "Who hath been [the Lord's] counselor?" Who would be so foolish as to presume to counsel the Lord how to run His kingdom? He has no need of counselors, and yet, strangely, He *is* a counselor Himself. There is none above Him to counsel. Therefore his counsel must be for those below him, His subjects, His people.

He is our Wonderful Counselor. *Wondrous* Counselor is a better translation, for his counsel is better than that of any man. His counsel is filled with wonder, for from His mouth proceeds wisdom that no man has ever heard. The wisest man who lived, King Solomon, prophetically describes the Son of God in the book of Proverbs, as Wisdom incarnate. The apostle John declares that He is the Word of God, which made the universe. All wisdom and all truth belongs to Him. He is the fountainhead, whereas all truth or wisdom that men may offer is but a trickle or a stream that flow from Him. The wisest man who ever lived, save Christ Himself, was King Solomon, yet it was the Wondrous Counselor that granted Solomon that wisdom which he

lacked, as a gift of grace. The wisdom of Christ must exceed the wisdom of Solomon as the light of the Sun exceeds the moon which can only reflect its light.

What counsel does He bring to us? The words of eternal life. His counsel instructs us in the way of salvation. Since the beginning, scientists and philosophers have searched for the secret to immortality, and have failed. But here Christ, God's gift to men, comes bringing the wisdom of eternal life, and He has a vested interest in making sure that men know this wisdom, for He desires to bestow such life upon all men. He does so because He has a kingdom to fill. He has a kingdom that is established forevermore. It increases without limit to embrace all of creation. And yet, what is an eternal kingdom, without an eternal people to live in it? Yet we are mortals, doomed to die because of our sins. This is a fate that we can in no way prevent. Death will finally take us all.

Only His counsel can rescue us. He brings to us Words of salvation. Words of eternal life. His Words are not empty things. They are powerful, because they are not the words of just a man, but of the Mighty God. They once created the universe. Now they create faith in our hearts. They transform us from the enemies of God, to His own dear children. They are words of everlasting peace, for His wondrous counsel alone can put our hearts at peace. At the end of all things, it shall be His Words that re-create this world into a new kingdom where nothing but righteousness and peace shall dwell forever.

He alone will accomplish what foolish men have worked for, but always failed to achieve. He brings world peace. He is, after all, the prince of peace. But peace is never achieved unless there is first war. However much in our modern world we may think that appeasement and negotiation might resolve our conflicts with other nations, there can be no negotiating with the devil, and this evil world. Our flesh will not submit to divine rule with any amount of force, for though it may obey externally, it rebels constantly in its thoughts and hatred and lust. True peace will never result unless the enemies are utterly destroyed. Only then can His eternal kingdom be rightly established.

And thus this mighty God has come to men to establish His kingdom with judgment and with justice. His judgment is perfect in every way, and his justice is exacting and complete. He judges the sins of all mankind, all of our deeds, and He takes them upon Himself so that He might fully execute His justice against all of our wickedness. Indeed, there is no other way for Him to execute perfect judgment and justice *unless* he takes upon Himself the guilt and punishment of

our sins. The damned experience the truth that the wages of sin is greater than the passage of time in hell can settle. Therefore hell is eternal. But yet in Christ there is perfect judgment and justice for all sin. His own death bridges the gap of eternity. That is how He comes to order and to establish His kingdom.

He is zealous in His purpose, for the enemy in this battle is not easily overcome. It is no light thing to overthrow all evil. You can imagine that with God all things are possible, and with His almighty power, this task would seem as nothing to Him, but you would be wrong. Christ the Lord came in the only way He could come if we were to be redeemed. He came as a child. He came as the natural born Son of God. Though He and the Father are indeed one, so that here Isaiah can rightly call Him the everlasting Father, none of this changes the fact that Jesus was a real man. A real child. He could not accomplish His purpose unless He came to us in this way. The justice of the cross could not have been used on God alone. God had to become man, and go to the cross as man. As he suffered for all sin, and battled all evil, He had to do this not just as the mighty God, but as the child who was given at Bethlehem. He had to do this as a real human being. Therefore, no matter how we may sanitize His great sacrifice in our own minds and say that God can do anything, we must never forget the man, Jesus Christ, for it is in this person, who is both God and Man, that we come to know the Father.

Therefore it is only His all-consuming holy zeal that could allow Him to save us from our sins. He was consumed with the desire to redeem us. So great was His zeal, that it exceeded what any man could do. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts filled Him, a zeal to save His people, no matter the cost.

This is the wondrous Gift which God brought into the world in the advent of His Son. As the world attempts to trivialize this story, and make it nothing but the story of a remarkable human being, never forget how truly remarkable the Advent of Christ is. Let the words of the Prophet Isaiah dwell in your hearts this Advent. Let them be to you as the sweetest music, so that once you have heard the story, and plumbed its depths, you cannot help but go back to hear more. This is the wondrous counsel of the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace. Hear it and believe, and receive the gift of Christ Jesus. Then you shall have enduring life and peace. Amen.