

Wonderful Counselor

Rejoice, rejoice, believers, fellow Christians, joyful worshipers of Christ-child lying in the manger. Rejoice, **“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.”**

A few years ago I preached on this beautiful passage of God’s Word from the prophet Isaiah. These words were written over 700 years before Jesus was even born, and yet they speak about the Messiah with such clarity and give so much comfort that one sermon just wouldn’t do justice to this passage, unless that sermon were a few hours long. So I didn’t get very far that first time. I only made it through, **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.”** Now, in that sermon we pondered how this Christ-child does everything to or for us. He came to us; was born for us; lived for us; suffered for us; was crucified for us; was raised for us; rules the world for us; forgives all sins for us; is always there for us; gives eternal life to us. Earthly monarchs don’t do things for us, but this Christ-child does everything for us and gives everything to us. We also pondered how this Christ-child carries his government, his kingdom, his Church on his shoulders. Earthly kings don’t carry anything; they make their subjects carry the heavy burdens of the kingdom. But Jesus carries his kingdom; he bears the weight of his Church and all our sins on his shoulders. He came not **“to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28)**. So Jesus was born for us and carries us on his shoulders. That’s how far we got in the last sermon.

And today I don’t expect to get much farther. In fact, on this Christmas Eve, I’d like us simply to ponder this: **“And he will be called Wonderful Counselor.”** That first word, “Wonderful” – in Hebrew it’s not actually an adjective describing a counsellor who’s so good that we would call him wonderful. No, it’s actually a noun; it’s a stand-alone title for the Messiah. So, really, we could put a comma after “Wonderful” (like the King James did) and think of that as the first name he’s being called here. **“He will be called Wonderful.”** He’s a wonder; he’s wondrous, astounding, marvelous, miraculous, extraordinary, something beyond our understanding. Jesus is a wonder because he does wonderful things we could never imagine or expect – things that make us wonder.

Like, do you ever wonder, what’s Jesus doing in the manger anyway? If the creator of heaven and earth had a creation that rebelled against him, why wouldn’t he just destroy them, and why would he come to live with them? And even if he did come and live with them, why would he come as a baby – a helpless, defenseless, not even potty-trained baby? And why would he choose for his mother not a royal queen but a teenage peasant virgin, who had no social status, and who for the rest of his childhood would be labeled an adulteress? And why would he choose to be born in backwater Bethlehem and not the capital city, where the temple was. And why would he let himself be placed in manger, next to cattle fodder and animal slobber? This is God we’re talking about! This is a wonder!

You also wonder who this baby really is. Who are we dealing with here? This baby is a flesh and blood human being, with a heart that beats and lungs that breath and a body that needs food and water – he is fully human. But this baby is also God himself, the eternal, almighty deity, who governs the universe from his throne in heaven and dispatches angels to accomplish what he desires – this human baby is also fully God. This is a wonder!

And just wonder for a moment about his life and his ministry. Why choose common fishermen instead of angels to introduce Christianity to the world? Why put himself through extraordinary torture and death by crucifixion to save sinners? Why make himself the sacrifice? Why let Pilate condemn him? Why let the soldiers mock him and the disciples abandon him? Why not just send the whole corrupt world to hell and start over from scratch?

Which also, introspectively, makes us wonder, “Why does God love me? What does he see in me? If God were to take all the people in the world who ever have lived and ever will live, what about me makes him want me for his child? Surely he can see through the façade of my Christmas Eve piety and find within my sinful nature a heart calloused by sin, that loves to do what God hates and hates to do what God loves. I’m a selfish sinner. I don’t deserve any love from Jesus. Why should he show kindness to me?”

As we marvel and ponder and wonder about all these things, all we can do is gaze into the manger. For there we realize that the reason Jesus is wonderful, why he's a wonder, is because, contrary to reason and against seemingly better judgment, Jesus does love us. And he shows us his love, he proves his love, by doing wonderful things that we could never imagine. And we see it all, right there, lying in a manger, the humble gift from heaven, who embodies God's love for us and who represents a story of salvation we couldn't possibly have written on our own. This is the Savior God gives us at Christmas. He's a wonder. Jesus is Wonderful.

“And he will be called...Counselor.” Jesus is our Counselor. A counsellor is someone who gives you counsel or advice to help you through a difficult situation. And we have all kinds of counselors, like financial advisors, sales consultants, travel agents, guidance counselors, psychological counselors; they all counsel and advise us with their own wisdom and expertise. But Jesus is called our Counselor, because his wisdom and his expertise surpass all. And he doesn't need to surround himself with counselors advising him, because he himself is the Church's perfect Counselor. And when he counsels us, he uses nothing other than his holy Gospel, because there is no other news, no other message, no other advice or counsel that can guide us through our spiritual troubles than the Gospel of God's full and free forgiveness through Jesus.

Jesus is our Gospel Counselor when Satan attacks. You see, Satan is constantly waging war against our guilty conscience; he's always trying to crush us under our guilt. He knows our weaknesses; he knows the temptations that we most easily give into; and he knows that guilt leads to doubt, and doubt leads to unbelief; and unbelief leads to hell. And that's really Satan's end goal – to get us into hell. And so he constantly reminds us of our sins and nags at our souls. He says, “Look what you did! Look at the kind of person you are! Did you really just look at that website? Did you really just do that, with that person, who's definitely not your spouse? Is that really what you think about in your mind? Is that the way you talk with your mouth? You think God doesn't know what you did or isn't angry at what you've done?” These are Satan's incessant attacks that crush our conscience, his fiery darts that penetrate the armor of our faith. And when they come, we can either give up and let Satan win.

Or we can flee for help to our Counselor. And there in the manger, with his holy Gospel, is our Counselor. Christ calls us to the side of his crib and says, “My dear one, look at me! Look at my manger; I was born for you, to live and die for you! Look at my hands and my feet; I was crucified for you! Look at my tomb; it's empty for you! I came to save you! I baptized you into my family! You are mine, and I am yours! Don't listen to your heart; your heart tempts you and accuses you and blames you. Listen to me; I have the words of everlasting life; believe my Gospel; I am your Counselor.”

We need our Counselor, to comfort us. Lord, **“Your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Ps 23:4)**. We need to lean on the staff of God's Word and drink deeply from the quiet waters of his grace. We need to constantly remind ourselves, “I've been baptized; I belong to God.” We need to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, again and again, where Jesus reinforces for us that our sins are indeed forgiven. When Satan attacks us, and guilt crushes us, we must flee back to the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, because this is where Jesus counsels us. This is how we find comfort and strength; this is how God draws us to himself; this is how our faith is strengthened – through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. This is the counsel that comes from Jesus our Counselor.

Dear Christian people gathered at the manger, sink these truths down deep into your heart. Jesus was born for you, to carry you on his shoulders. He is Wonderful. His saving ways are wondrous; his love is a wonder. And he is our Counselor, who counsels us through his holy Gospel to believe in him as our Savior from sin. Don't pass by this Wonder without wondering in amazement, and don't brush this Counselor's counsel aside. This is your Jesus. This is who he is, for you, forever. Amen.

Isaiah 9:6

⁶ 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.