

Oh, how Jesus loved to talk about his Father—his Father this, his Father that, his Father’s house, his Father’s business! When he went to the cross, he prayed, *"Father, forgive them"* (Lk 23:34). When he rose from the dead, he told his disciples, *"I am ascending to my Father and your Father"* (Jn 20:17). And when he taught us to pray, he told us to say, *"Our Father"* (Mt 6:9). Jesus’ entire work of redemption can best be described as reconciling us to the Father and restoring us to our relationship as members of his family. So, in this regard, too, the Holy Spirit had me right on target.

Finally, Jesus is the *Prince of Peace*. It is such a unique and special kind of peace that Jesus came to bring. We look in vain if we search for this kind of peace in the temporary possessions and shallow relationships of the world. It was my New Testament brother, Paul, who described this unique peace this way: *"Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ro 5:1). This is *"the peace of God that transcends all understanding"* (Php 4:7). As you look forward to Christmas, think of Bethlehem as the place where Jesus put you at peace with God. Look there—in the stable, in the stall, in the stubble, in the straw—and you will find the *Prince of Peace*.

My dear friends, that’s what Christmas is all about. There’s such a timeless quality to Christmas! You see, Christmas meant as much to me, living and believing God’s promises some 800 years B.C.—before Christ—as it means to you, living some 2000 years after the promises were fulfilled. The straw of the stable, the crude beams of the cross, and the stark emptiness of the tomb are all there in the prophecies of my book. They reach all the way back to Adam and Eve and all the way forward to the very last person born on earth. What that means is that they are reaching out also to you right now. They break down every barrier that isolates people from God and people from people. Before him who is *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*, sin, death, Satan, hell, and every evil must flee and, ultimately, pass away.

As the Old Testament Evangelist, I foretold the good news of salvation in Christ centuries before it found its fulfillment in his coming. I lived by faith in what lay ahead. You live by faith in what has already happened. Don’t be mistaken, though. The Christ of Christmas is timely in every age. Receive him again in your time, in your place, in your heart, and in your home and, I promise you this, your celebration of Christmas will be the best you’ve ever had. Amen.

Isaiah 6:1-7; 7:10-14; 9:6,7; 53:5,6 – St. Paul’s, Muskego, WI
11/27/16 – Pastor David M. Kuehl – 2, 1 (1, 2, 6), 5 (1-4), 3, 22

It all happened some 800 years B.C.—which, by the way, means *before Christ* or *before Christmas*. God the Holy Spirit had inspired me to prophesy to the king of Judah, whose name was Ahaz. The prophecy that I delivered to him spoke to his immediate need for a sign but, deep down, I sensed that there was more to it than that.

You see, the kings of Syria and Israel to the north were threatening Judah. They had boasted that they would invade my land, tear it into pieces, and divide it between them. God sent me to Ahaz to assure him that this wouldn’t happen and to encourage him to stand firm and not worry. As proof, God invited Ahaz to ask for a sign: *"Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."* But Ahaz arrogantly refused: *"I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."* God’s Spirit stirred deep within me and moved me to say, *"The LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*

By the way, let me introduce myself. I am Isaiah, prophet of the Lord Most High. I was invited to preach in your midst about ten years ago. I served as God’s mouthpiece to his people during the reigns of four kings of Judah. Because the Lord blessed me with prophecies of the Messiah to come, and of his messianic kingdom, I am often called:

Isaiah: The Old Testament Evangelist

1. Now, the words that the Holy Spirit spoke through me were initially intended to assure Ahaz that the threat against Judah from the two northern kings would amount to nothing. But there was a more important meaning to my prophecy. Centuries later, Matthew, one of Jesus’ disciples, picked up on my prophecy and pointed to its greater meaning. It was a prophecy that foretold not just the rescue of Judah but the redemption of the entire world, as well.

This is how it came about. Matthew was writing about the birth of Jesus and the anxiety that Joseph was feeling when he learned that Mary, his fiancé, was pregnant—and not by him. God sent an angel to reassure Joseph that Mary had not cheated on him and that the baby growing inside of her had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. The angel even told Joseph that Mary would give birth to a son and that they were to give him the name *Jesus*, because he would save his people from their sins. In fact, the name *Jesus* means Savior.

Then Matthew, with my prophecy in mind, wrote, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet" (that's me!): 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means, 'God with us')" (Mt 1:22, 23). Oh, how well Matthew understood that my prophecy was really a prophecy about Christ! He was pointing to the very One about whom I had prophesied when the Spirit moved me to say, "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. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this."

I want you to know that I'm being completely honest when I tell you that everything that follows in Matthew's Gospel—Jesus' virgin birth, his life of obedience, his mighty miracles and matchless messages, his deeds of love and mercy, and especially his death on the cross and his death-smashing victory three days later—all of this can be called *the story of Immanuel*. This Jesus is *God with us*. He's God for us, God among us, God supporting us. He's God rescuing and redeeming and restoring us. He's God saving us and claiming us to be his own.

2. This God came down from heaven in the person of Jesus Christ and for thirty-three years lived in our midst. Centuries before his coming, however, I experienced him in a vision while worshiping at the temple. I saw him on his throne, surrounded by his holy angels. And I heard their song of praise: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Let me tell you, I was completely undone. There I was, facing my sin and my utter unworthiness. The first words I uttered were these: "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." I was terrified. But God had an angel touch a hot coal from the altar to my lips. It didn't hurt, and I wasn't burned. My lips were purified, and I was commissioned to be an evangelist, a preacher of the gospel. In the years that followed I was granted all kinds of visions that portrayed the ministry of the Messiah—and all this, mind you, some eight centuries before he ever appeared. In fact, some of your own teachers have said that it is as if I had actually been there in person—in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, on Calvary when he died, and at the tomb when he rose from the dead.

3. Let me give you just one example. The Holy Spirit gave me four unique names for the Messiah: "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Jesus lived up to every single one of them.

He is *Wonderful Counselor*, unlike any other counselor in the whole wide world. He didn't just give advice; he took on himself our problems and pains, our shame and guilt, our wickedness and sin. And, as God "laid on him the iniquity of us all," he also took on our punishment. For the Spirit moved me to write, "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." Jesus took us at our worst and gave us his best: his righteousness and perfection, his forgiveness and peace. Yes, by the grace of God, I was right on target—a bull's eye from 800 years away.

Jesus is also *Mighty God*. Think of what that means. The almighty Creator of heaven and earth, the One who took the sun and moon and stars and placed them in the sky—the One who at Christmas clutched the straw of the stable in his tiny, helpless hand. All this caused my brother in the faith, David, to exclaim, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain" (Ps 139:6).

This Jesus, the meek Child of Christmas, grew up to be mighty in battle. He took on all the powers of hell and, as the Spirit inspired my Christian brother, Paul, to say, "made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col 2:15). Because *Mighty God* won the victory for us, we now see him mighty in mercy, mighty in love, mighty in word and deed—mighty in every way. Nothing is too hard for him; nothing is impossible for him. He is perfectly qualified to be our Savior from sin, our divine Deliverer in every need.

His name is also *Everlasting Father*. Did you know that I am the only Old Testament prophet to call God *Father*? No one else dared to do that, for we all believed that we couldn't get that close to him. We were afraid even to speak God's name. But Jesus changed all that, for it is only through Jesus that you and I can now call God *Father*.