

*November 29, 2015*

*Isaiah 9:6: “This Child Is... Wonderful/Counselor”*

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 North Oakland Avenue  
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What's in a name? We live in a society in which parents often select a name for their child because of how the name sounds rather than because of what the name means. Still, as time passes by, the name that they selected for their child begins to have a content. Over time, the name "Joe" becomes the kid down the street who loves to ride his bicycle up and down the sidewalk and is always chewing gum and gets good grades. Or, then there is the name "Scott." We might know a number of people with that name. There is Scott who became a lawyer, and then there is Scott who works as a painter, and then there is Scott who doesn't work at all and is lazy. The point is that even if you chose a name because of the sound, it still has a meaning and a content that is filled with characteristics and actions.

What's in a name? As we begin our Advent series, we look ahead to the days of the birth of the One whose parents were told by an angel/messenger what to name Him. "You shall call His name Jesus," he said to both Mary and Joseph. With the assigning of the name "Jesus" the angel/messenger was saying **"This Child Is . . ."** And, the name "Jesus" means: "The Lord Saves." That name has a life-giving meaning for us. We all need to be saved which begs the question: Saved from what? The answer: sin, death, and the power of the devil.

What's in a name? Our appreciation of the name Jesus will grow during these Sundays of Advent as we consider the other names that Isaiah prophetically gave Him roughly 700 years before he was born. The content of his name will grow, and with that so will our understanding. Isaiah writes: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)!"

What's in a name? On this First Sunday In Advent we look at two names associated with Jesus the Savior. He is **"Wonderful!"** He is **"Counselor!"**

When we think of Jesus and define him as our Savior, we also add to it the thought that he is **"Counselor."** When we think of a counselor, we think of some person who is able to provide guidance as well as comfort when times are rough. But, before we go to or listen to a counselor, we must be convinced that the person will be able to give us good advice and guide us in the right way. It also helps to know that the counselor has an experience that is beyond ours. If we have no confidence in the person and that he might know more than we do, we will dismiss the counseling.

It is similar with Jesus. The difference is that Jesus is the one who knows all things, has endured all things for us, and imparts a perfect knowledge that is absolute truth. He is comfort when all else fails us.

Now, the word **"Wonderful"** is not designed to be an adjective like we might use it or think of it. For example, a starry-eyed girl or boy might say something like this: "Isn't he or she just wonderful!" For Jesus, **"Wonderful"** is more than an adjective, it is a name. It is the content of who he is and is more than a mere description. It is a term that actually points to a goodness in all things and is associated with his

self-sacrifice on the cross. It is about who he is and what he came to do. It takes us directly to his desire to give himself for the sins of the world.

With that in mind, we understand Jesus as being good by nature and in every way. He is exceedingly good. He is **“Wonderful.”** If this is the case, then that goodness is who he is, including the fact that his knowing all things, enduring all things, and his knowledge of everything is exceedingly good. With that understanding, one then begins to realize that all the names of Jesus in Isaiah 9:6 touch one another. Whatever name is given to Jesus, while it is a specific name for our understanding, it is in fact a part of the whole content of his person and work. In other words, all the names of Jesus are to be understood as being rolled up into one. It would be like calling me a bunch of names that are directly linked to the world **“Brock.”** He is undivided and yet divides into various names that we might come to an understanding of who he is and what he has in mind for us.

Now, what does all of this mean for us? How do these names apply to our lives down here? Well, the first thing that we can say is that as our **“Counselor”** Jesus is able to address our deepest need - solve it in the final sense. And what is our deepest need? He bids us to acknowledge ourselves to be the sinners that we are. John’s Gospel tells us that “[Jesus] needed no one to bear witness about man, for He himself knew what was in man (John 2:25).” That is a rather shocking statement if we think to ourselves that we can hide anything from him. He knows what is in you and me. Jesus knows that we are only stating the truth when we heartily confess that “we are by nature sinful, and have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone” and that “we have not loved God with our whole heart and have not loved our neighbor as ourselves.”

He knows that we are responsible to God for who we are and what we do. Yet, Jesus does not drag us into the courtroom to face the just judgment that we deserve. Rather, in the courtroom, Jesus pronounces us **“Not Guilty”** because he himself has taken our guilt and nailed it to the cross. Such counsel is exceedingly good because he is good. He is **“Wonderful.”** And this goodness is directly linked to his sacrifice - his suffering and death on the cross. We see this powerfully expressed in the book of Judges when Manoah prepares a burnt offering and the messenger of the Lord, who is Jesus before he became one of us, answers Manoah’s question: “What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?” And Jesus says to Manoah, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?” And then we read in the book of Judges:

So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to the one who works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching. And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD went up in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground (Judges 13:19-20).

Every other counselor insists that the solution to problems has to come from within the individual who has the problems, or from some solution that is man-made. This is not the case from the one who is both **“Wonderful”** and **“Counselor.”** He insists that our problem is solved by who he is and what he has

done for us. He insists that our problem of sin, death, and the devil can only be take away by him. And so he takes our sin. He dies our death. And he faces the devil and conquerors him when he is tempted in the wilderness, and when he must face him in the Garden before his trial and crucifixion. And, of course he faces sin, death, and the devil on the cross.

It says in Scripture that the Son came into this world not to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him! He counsels us to believe in Him - to trust that he is wonderful to us. And in that he gives to us the great gifts of forgiveness for all of ours sins. He grants a new life now and forever. And he reaches into our existence and saves us from all of our wicked ways. You can't get that kind of wonderful anywhere else. Nor can you get that kind of counsel from a worldly psychologist or psychiatrist. Peter writes: "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)."

The "**Wonderful**" and "**Counselor**" - who is Jesus - is so contrary to what we might logically expect to hear about the Holy God, who hates sin and will not allow for it, should make us pause and understand that the Bible and what it says is indeed otherworldly. We could not have come up with such a thing ourselves. All religions, but Christianity, develop religious systems by which people must do it themselves. Such religion leads to nothing but despair and dreadful facing of a holy God who demands absolute perfection. But, the Good News of Jesus is unique. It says that God is pleased in his Son to accept us by grace, through faith in His Son - because of the work he did for us.

Too good to be true? Too illogical? Too incredible? Then go to Bethlehem this Christmas and see the child born of a virgin. His name his "Jesus" - the One who saves. Listen to the angels sing "Glory to God and peace on earth" because of his birth. In the manger is "**Wonderful.**" The shepherds come to behold their "**Counselor.**" What's in a name? A lot! The names tell us who this child is and all that he has done!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott