

## His Name Shall Be Called ...

### Counselor

### Isaiah 9:6

December 12, 2001 -- Advent 2  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Boise, Idaho  
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For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His name will be called "Counselor."

Last week, we heard the news that our Savior is called Wonderful, and why. He is Wonderful because He does things far beyond what we are able to do, and He is Wonderful because He does things far beyond what we are able to see or sense. Namely, He is able to redeem us from our sin by His death on the cross and raise us up to eternal life; but as He does these things, He cloaks His glory so that we do not see Him at work.

But if we cannot see or comprehend His wonderful works, how can we ever know what He does for us? For that, we move on to His next name in Isaiah 6:9: His name will be called "Counselor." Our Lord Jesus is not content to be some anonymous wonder worker, for then we could not believe in Him. Therefore, He gives us His Word—His sure and certain Word. Where what He does is beyond our ability to see or sense or believe, He tells us about it. Furthermore, by His Word He gives us the faith to believe in it—even and especially when His will and promises for us seem completely contrary to the wisdom of the world. The wisdom of God often seems like foolishness to man; but it remains the saving wisdom of God.

Therefore, rejoice! The One who is called Wonderful is also called Counselor; for He counsels and teaches you by His Word, that you might know of His grace and salvation.

#### I. The Counselor Visits Elizabeth and John (Luke 1:39-56)

The Counselor is at work in our Gospel lesson for this night; even though He is an unborn, just-forming baby, it does not prevent Him from offering His counsel of salvation. Mary arrives at Elizabeth's house, and there she greets Elizabeth. There is little doubt that this greeting is more than "Hi, How are ya." As Mary greets Elizabeth, the greeting includes the reason for the visit: The angel Gabriel has appeared to her and told her that she will be the mother of Jesus, the Savior. As Mary declares this greeting and repeats the angel's words, she is declaring the Word of the Lord that the angel declared to her. And if she is declaring the Word of the Lord, she is declaring the Word of the eternal Counselor who is developing in her womb.

Behold the Counselor as He counsels Elizabeth with this Good News. By His Word which Mary speaks, He sends His Holy Spirit to give Elizabeth faith. Therefore, Elizabeth has no doubts, but believes that Mary is in fact the mother of the Lord. She believes this message not by her own reason

and strength, but because the Counselor is there, giving her the faith by His Word to believe it to be true.

The Counselor's wonder of giving Elizabeth faith is miracle enough; what else happens is phenomenal. At the sound of Mary's greeting and the truth of the Word, the unborn John the Baptist leaps in Elizabeth's womb. The Counselor essentially declares, "Ah, cousin, the world may think that you are far too tiny and unborn to believe, but your Savior is here." The unborn John leaps for joy, because the Counselor has come. And the Counselor is more than just words; He is the Savior who does what He says, and He will go to the cross and die to save the world from sin. At the bidding of the Counselor, the Holy Spirit brings John to leap for joy!

The Counselor isn't done. By the work of His Holy Spirit, Mary sings the most profound song. It is not a song from the world's perspective: When the world sings songs about life, it glorifies success and beauty, wealth and power. It then declares the blessings of the successful and beautiful, the wealthy and powerful; and makes everybody else wish they could be like them. Mary's song is far different, for Mary sings of the work of God. He does not exalt the powerful, but makes use of even a lowly maidservant to further His will for our salvation. He is merciful and helpful to those who fear and love Him, not to those who believe they have earned the right by their efforts and piety. He cares for the hungry and lowly, while He admonishes those who are satisfied and proud. It is, her song says, no curse to be humble, poor and weak as long as one has God's favor. Such a song makes no sense to a world of power, wealth and success; it is the song of the Counselor, the One who is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit (Ps. 34:18).

So the Counselor counsels us through Mary, and counsels Mary as well. She is already in a bit of a pickle, as an innocent unwed virgin about to give birth, whose betrothed husband is looking into divorce on false assumptions. Things will not get much better. After the Baby is born, they'll have to flee from Herod to Egypt, and she'll hear of the many sons whom Herod kills. After her Son is grown, many will label Him a lunatic or heretic. She will see Him crucified as well. Mary's life will not be easy or privileged or successful in a worldly way. But the Counselor prepares her with the truth that He has given her faith, and that the Lord will be merciful to her.

Well before He is born, then, the Counselor already counsels His people with news of His salvation. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, He is now incarnate, present to direct His Holy Spirit to proclaim His truth. What He counsels defies human wisdom and expectation. The world wants a Savior who is mature, powerful and victorious. It has no desire for a Counselor who bids people to repentance even before His birth; and it certainly has no use for a dead Savior on the cross.

## II. The Counselor Now

You know better, and so you rejoice that this same Jesus gently counsels you. Against the evil and violence of this world, against the lies of the devil and the attacks of your sinful flesh, the Counselor sends forth His Spirit with His means of grace. He is far past being born of Mary, crucified, raised and ascended; but He continues to offer His gracious counsel to you by His precious means of grace.

The One who counseled John the Baptist-before either of them were born-still counsels even the tiniest infant with grace and salvation. He soothes and says, "Dear little one, the world barely recognizes your life as worthwhile, and even many well-intentioned people will declare that you are far too little and helpless to believe. But I tell you better, for I tell you the wisdom of God. You

believe even now because I have died for you, I forgive you and I give you faith to believe in Me. Let the world say what it will about you. Let them call you little, and I will shield you with My might. Let them call you helpless, and I will be your Protector. Let them say you are weak, and I will make My power perfect in you. Let them say you cannot believe; I will say, 'Of such is the Kingdom of God.'" The Counselor says all this, though He uses different words to do it: He sums it up with the powerful statement, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." He adds His Word to water and the Holy Spirit grants the faith.

The One who counseled Mary to sing her song still counsels the poor, the underprivileged and the weak. He says, "Dearly beloved, the world has no kind words for you, other than a cheap wish that you can somehow make good on its terms; for in glorifying worldly wealth and power, the world denigrates you. But I tell you different. I, too, had a lowly birth-and I have died a mean death on a cross. By the world's standards, I amounted to little; but in My lowliness, I have redeemed the world from sin. Do not fall to the world's temptations of jealousy and covetousness; for I declare to you that I give My life to you, and to you belong the everlasting treasures of heaven."

The One who counseled Elizabeth, battling the frailties of age and the demands of a pregnancy, still counsels the frail, the sick and the dying today. He says, "Beloved child, your health and time both teach you the wages of sin, and this causes you dismay. But look away for a moment from the symptoms you feel and the medical reports you read. Look away and listen-listen once again to the story of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth. I am there. I, the Counselor, am present there in flesh and blood, waiting to be born in Bethlehem. And now that I've taken on flesh and blood, I've kept it-on the cross, in the grave, and even as I ascend into heaven and sit at God's right hand. I have redeemed all of you. Even now as you experience the corruption of sin in your body, I feed you My body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. And because you must endure change and decay in this life, I counsel you now with My Word and My Sacraments to prepare you. For, you see, I've taken My flesh and blood to heaven for eternity; and so I will raise you up, body and soul, for eternity as well."

To sinners the Counselor declares, "You know the message of the devil, the world and your own sinful flesh all too well: 'Forget this Jesus and His Law and Gospel. Give it up and move on. Party, crash, enjoy or, despair-whatever. Follow your own desires. Do what you want; but just don't repent and believe.' But I have a better Word of counsel for you: I have died to redeem you from this world, to give you real life that last long after this world is perished. Do not give up or despair. Repent, and be of good cheer, for your sins are forgiven you."

To the worried and anxious, to those who wonder where God is because they see no sign of Him, the Counselor speaks: "In its foolishness, the world demands proof to its liking before it will believe in Me. But look again at Mary's visit to Elizabeth. Do you see Me there? No, there's not a sign. I'm far too tiny in human terms for Mary to feel Me kick, and Elizabeth cannot see Me. John is hardly in a position to see Me, either. But all three of them rejoice in My presence, because I have told them; and by My Word they believe. Therefore, do not be frightened or anxious that you cannot see some glorious sign of My presence. I am not with you because you see so, but because I say so. I am as near to you as My Word and My Sacraments. I have promised never to leave you nor forsake you, and I will keep My promise."

This is the work of the One called Wonderful and Counselor. He does what we are not able to do: He heals the sick and casts out demons, He dies to redeem the world, He rises from the dead and raises us from the dead. And lest these Wonderful works be forgotten in the mists of history, the Counselor

tells us about them in His Word. In His wisdom, He does these Wonderful things largely beyond our ability to see or feel; but He counsels about them in His Word-His powerful, effective Word. The Word that caused Mary to sing and John to leap.

The Word that cleanses you of all of your sins.

Therefore, dear hearers in Christ, rejoice! For the Counselor utters these miraculous words to you, that you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen