

**His Name Shall Be Called ...  
Everlasting Father  
Isaiah 9:6**

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Boise, Idaho  
Pastor Tim Pauls

## I. Zacharias

Old Zacharias sits and stares at his newborn son. No doubt, there's a mix of feelings going on in the priest's head. There is, of course, pride that he has a son; that's what fathers feel, and Zacharias must have a special pride in this miracle baby, for he and Elizabeth are far too old for such a blessing to be theirs. And along with that pride, there is likely wonder at the Lord's Word. The angel told Zacharias that all of this would happen when Zacharias stood in the temple. Zacharias didn't believe it at first, which is why he can't speak at the moment. But while he doubted, the Lord kept His promise: There's the baby boy, just as He said.

Of course, there are other thoughts in his mind, including that protectiveness that comes with seeing your own helpless baby. Being a protective dad to a newborn is actually pretty easy because the baby can't go anywhere. He can't move or get into stuff or run away and get into trouble; you know where he is and he can't escape. But that won't last very long, and Zacharias knows that he's an elderly man—he won't always be around to take care of his son, and may not even be around for very long at all. Plus, the angel has told Zacharias that John will lead many to righteousness, which means that he will have to confront all sorts of unrighteousness and evil. As a faithful priest, Zacharias knows all too well that this means his son will be in great danger. The time will come when John will be on his own. Zacharias is a father, who no doubt wants to take care of his son. But Zacharias' end is near, and his fatherhood is not everlasting.

So, when he is gone, who will take care of his baby boy? There will be plenty who stand in the way, well-intentioned and not. In just a couple more days at the boy's circumcision, there will be the knot of well-meaning relatives who insist that John's name cannot be John because that's not what the family does; and despite their sincere motives, they'll unknowingly be second-guessing the command of God.

When John is grown and preaching, he'll face the foes known as the Pharisees. These respectable, learned scholars will do their best to make the Messiah into a Judge, a litigator who saves those who toe the line and keep all the rules well enough to please him. They will be formidable foes, but there will be worse.

Eventually John will die for doing something unforgivable in the eyes of many: He will tell the truth. He will publicly warn King Herod of the sin of his immorality, and the king will hardly respond with gratitude. He will have John shut up in prison. Later on, he will have John's head for his faithfulness.

There will be no protection from Zacharias then, for Zacharias will either be long gone or far too feeble to do anything about it. It's the dread of the father, knowing his son faces danger and being

helpless to prevent it.

When Zacharias is gone, who will take care of his little boy?

John's cousin will. He's a few months' younger than John and yet to be born, but John is already under His protection. This wonderful One has already begun to counsel John, causing him to leap in Elizabeth's womb. He will grow up in the grace and favor of God and those around Him, and He will be an upright, righteous man. John will baptize this, his protector, declaring Him to be so great that he is unworthy to untie the thong of his cousin's sandals. And on the day he baptizes his cousin, in order to declare the wonder and majesty of Jesus, John will call Him...a lamb. The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. It's the Lamb who will take care of Zacharias' little boy.

Or will He? To the world without faith, it's a strange sort of care and protection. When John is arrested, Jesus keeps on preaching about the kingdom of God. When he is beheaded, Jesus withdraws into solitude and mourns. Later on, when Jesus is arrested by John's old enemies-the Pharisees and Herod, He will...be put to death. And if John is dead and if Jesus is dead, who is looking out for Zacharias' baby boy?

Jesus is, of course, because in His death He is dying for His cousin John-and for all the world. And three days later, He rises again from the dead forever. Pharisees may slander John and a king might kill him, but Jesus raises him from the dead to everlasting life. Jesus dies, yes-because He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, just as John said. But Jesus has other names as well: Wonderful and Counselor, which we've spoken of before; and also Everlasting Father.

The Lord Jesus is called Everlasting Father, and the crucifixion isn't going to nullify the title. Christ dies, yes; but He also rises to reign forever. And because He is the Everlasting Father, He will keep His promises and raise up John forever.

That's who will look after Zacharias' little boy: No less than the Everlasting Father. He'll also look after Zacharias.

He also looks after you.

## II. The Everlasting Father

Who looks after you? The One called the Everlasting Father, Jesus. And to appreciate the wonder of this statement, first note what Jesus is NOT called.

Jesus is NOT called a tyrannical king, one who demands absolute obedience, tolerates no disagreement and quickly executes those who oppose him. John the Baptist faced such a merciless king in Herod, and the world still has more than enough such men. In fact, the world glorifies such men, for this is often the type who rises to the top of their profession because of their ruthlessness and focus. Jesus is not that kind of a king, though He has been preached that way before-and sometimes still is. There will be some who tell you that Jesus is a severe sort of ruler. He hates sin and He's died for it, which is true enough. But they will then go on to assure you that He remains angry at you, especially since you still sin despite His sacrifice. Therefore, the Christian life is all about watching your step, lest your king finally lose patience and toss you into the pits of hell unless you straighten up and start doing your part for Him. If that is the case, be afraid. You dare never sin

again; and if you do, don't confess it to Him. Hide it under the rug somewhere. Do lots of good works in hope of getting His favor back.

But Jesus is not some sort of cruel ruler who has had just about enough of you. Nor is He an emperor who directs you to slaughter all infidels who do not believe in Him. How terrible it would be if the Christian life was all about living in fear of our Savior. But Jesus is not called a tyrannical king. He's called the Everlasting Father.

Jesus is not called a "graceless judge." He will judge all people on the Last Day, but He is not just a Judge. Being a judge alone has one great drawback: a judge can exercise mercy, but he can't exercise grace. In mercy, a judge can give a criminal less punishment than he deserves. But a judge can't erase the crime and remove the guilt-he can't absolve the sinner. Were Jesus just a judge, He could conceivably let you off with less punishment than you deserve. But He couldn't get you into heaven if He were just a judge, because He couldn't give you grace, erasing your sin so that you could stand holy in the presence of God. Some will preach Jesus as a judge much like some preach him as an angry king: You're going to be judged on the Last Day by Jesus, whom the world put to death. The Savior is already in a foul mood, so you'd better straighten up and work your way to perfection. You've got to do your part, you know.

But Jesus is not called a "graceless judge" who waits for an excuse to condemn you. There is no other judge like Him, for this Judge has already paid the price for all the crimes of all of those who stand before Him. He earnestly declares this to be true, and desires to declare all who stand before Him to be innocent. He will only condemn those who refuse to accept His work on their behalf. He is full of mercy and grace. He is not some "graceless judge." He's called the Everlasting Father.

Jesus is not called a "shrewd businessman," for He does not run His kingdom like a corporation. He is often preached this way, as if He says to you, "Look, I'll be a Father to you for a while, and absolutely free; but after that the payments kick in. I've gotten you started by forgiving you. Now, you'd better pull your own weight and prove yourself an asset to My group, and I'll promote you based upon the works that you do. If you're not an asset to my group, then, well, you're fired." How haunting that would be, if the Savior promised unconditional love and free salvation-but only for a limited time before He began to demand that you produce your own righteousness to keep yourself in the company. But Jesus is not called a "shrewd businessman" who looks out for you as long as you look out for Him. He's called the Everlasting Father.

He is called "Father," and with good reason, for He treats us as a good father treats his children. In keeping with their God-given responsibilities, fathers are supposed to lay down the law, to teach their children the difference between right and wrong and the importance of obedience. They are also to provide for their children, teach them of salvation, protect them and even die for them if need be. Earthly fathers don't always live up to these tasks; but your Savior does. He lays down His Law for you in His Word, so that you might know what is pleasing to God and the sin that leads to eternal death. But Jesus also provides for you and declares that salvation is yours because He has already died for you.

Everlasting - this is not a temporary situation. Who Jesus is and what He does, does not change. He has suffered and died on Calvary for you, and nothing can change this truth. He promises forgiveness, and that promise-like the Everlasting One who gives His Word-is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Because He is Wonderful, He accomplishes what you cannot and defeats death and the devil. Because He is the Counselor, He declares this victory to you in His Word. Because He is the Mighty God, He has the power to enforce His Word. Because He is the Prince of Peace, He rules with grace forever. But all of these titles are incomplete without the name "Everlasting Father;" for this name declares that Jesus calls you His beloved child and does all these things for you.

So, who will look out for you? The answer is a comfort, indeed.

Who will look out for you when you've sinned? Really sinned? Can't forgive-yourself-sinned? No gods created by human minds will. They'll have some sort of message like "Get over it" or "Boy, you did mess up, so you'd better start groveling now." But in the end, gods created by human minds leave it all up to you to look out for you. Your Everlasting Father, however, has different words for you. He says, "You may think that what you did is unforgivable, but I see the big picture. I've suffered the torments of hell on the cross and I've died for the sins of the world. Your sin may be grave, but I've gone to the grave for it. I'm looking out for you, and so I say you're forgiven."

Who will look out for you when you doubt, when you're discouraged enough that you're not sure that the promises of God have any hope for you? The gods of human invention will be no help: They tell you that they will help you only inasmuch as you believe in them. (This is no surprise, since they are false gods with no power to give, and must therefore trick you into thinking that your efforts are really their help.) Therefore, they will not help you until you stop doubting. Your Everlasting Father, however, acts differently; He does not withhold help from His beloved children until their faith in Him is perfect. He declares, "I have died to forgive your doubts, and I offer you faith even now. Do not believe that your doubts and anxieties separate you from me; rather, confess them for the sins that they are, and trust that I forgive you. I've gone to the cross so I can do exactly that. I've given you faith to believe, and I will help you in your unbelief."

Who will look after you when you fall short, when weakness prevents you from accomplishing the things you need to do? The false gods of human invention teach a quid pro quo: You do your part for them, and they'll do your part for you. They will not look out for you when you are weak and fail; since they glorify strength and power and achievement, they'll simply turn away and move on to venerate those who can accomplish things. Your Savior is different however. Your Everlasting Father says, "I know your weaknesses and your failings even better than you do, and I know that you fall short. And this is precisely why I have borne your weaknesses, failings and sins to the cross. I therefore forgive you all of your sins, and promise to accomplish what you cannot. My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." That's who looks out for you when you fall short.

Who will look out for you when you mourn? The gods of human invention appear slick and appealing for this life, but none of them can raise from the dead because none of them are alive or risen. Instead, they can only point the past and raise doubts. Not so your Everlasting Father: Jesus has endured death and is risen again, and He has accomplished your salvation all by His work. Therefore, He declares, "Do not try to predict salvation based on your efforts or anyone else's but Mine. I've died for you and I am risen again. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though He were dead, yet shall He live." This is who looks out for you.

Your Savior is called many names, and "Everlasting Father" is often lost among so many others that

are also rich in meaning. But do not pass this title by, for "Everlasting Father" defines how our Lord deals with us: Not as a tyrant-king, not as a graceless judge, not as a profit-minded businessman or a quid pro quo politician. For our sake, He has sacrificially gone to the cross and won redemption. He has done this so that He might declare to you everlastingly 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