

Second Sunday in Advent – December 10, 2017

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

His Name Shall Be Called ...Counselor

Isaiah 9:6

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.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Choosing an appropriate name for a new business is important. You would want that name to communicate who you are and what you do. And of course you'd want a name that would be memorable and set you apart from the competition.

Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace – those are some of the memorable names given to our Savior and they really do help us appreciate who he is and what he does for us, don't they? Last week we considered the name wonderful and our sermon pointed out that Jesus is wonderful because he does things which are often beyond our ability to do and our ability to comprehend. Even though we may not even be aware of it our Savior is working behind the scenes to bring salvation to us.

But if we cannot see or comprehend His wonderful works, how can we ever know what He does for us? The answer to that question is found as 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 and he helps us to believe it. By His Word He gives us the faith to believe -- especially when His will and promises for us seem completely contrary to the wisdom of the world.

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. Let's use a familiar advent account from Scripture to show us the Counselor at work.

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

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40) where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41) When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42) In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43) But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44) As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45) Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" 46) And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47) and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48) for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49) for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. 50) His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51) He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52) He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53) He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54) He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55) to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors." 56) Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

This account took place after the angel Gabriel had informed Mary that she would become the mother of the Savior. Mary arrived at Elizabeth's house, and there she greeted Elizabeth – informing her of the reason for her visit and sharing the wonderful news that the angel had given her. As Mary repeats the angel's words, she is sharing the Word of the Lord that the angel declared to her. And as she does that she's really sharing the word of that tiny one who is developing in her and who is called Counselor.

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.

But Elizabeth is not the only one affected by Mary's greeting. 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. 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 a most profound song – known to us as the Magnificat. 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 who saves all who have a contrite spirit (Ps. 34:18).

Mary sings of the comfort which the Counselor had given to her. Think of the situation that confronts Mary – she's an innocent unwed virgin about to give birth. Joseph her husband to be is looking into divorce on false assumptions. Since she is pregnant he assumes that she has sinned and has been unfaithful to him. Although the an angel comes to set him straight and he takes Mary home as his wife things do not get much better for Mary. 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.

Even before He is born, the Counselor already counsels His people with news of His salvation -- directing His Holy Spirit to proclaim His truth.

II. The Counselor Now

And by the grace of God this same Jesus gently counsels us. Jesus sends forth His Spirit with His means of grace to assist us in our struggles against the evil and violence of this world, against the lies of the devil and the attacks of your sinful flesh.

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, the Lord Jesus assure you that you can and do 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. And therefore you can assure your little ones of the Lord's blessings.

The One who counseled Mary to sing her song still counsels the poor, the underprivileged and the weak. He says, "Dearly beloved, the world may look down on you as it glorifies worldly wealth and power. But I think of you differently. I, too, had a lowly birth. I died a cruel death on a cross. By the world's standards, I didn't amount to much; but in My lowliness, I redeemed the world from sin. Do not fall into 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, who was 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. I came as the God-man to be your Savior. I have flesh and blood just like you and after I paid for your sins on the cross I came back to life. I ascended 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 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." Blessed are those who have not seen but yet have believed.

This is the work of the One called Wonderful and Counselor. He does what we are not able to do: He dies to redeem the world, He rises from the dead and raises us from the dead. And so that these Wonderful works will not be forgotten in the mists of history, the Counselor tells us about them in His Word. In His wisdom, He does Wonderful things -- things 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, we can rejoice and gladly sing:

Redeemer, come! I open wide My heart to you; here, Lord, abide!
Oh, enter with your saving grace; Show me your kind and friendly face.
Your Holy Spirit guide us on Until our glorious goal is won.
Eternal praise and fame We offer to your name. Amen.