Preaching Series: Christmas through the Eyes of Others
Sermon Title: Christmas through the Eyes of a Prophet

Text: **Isaiah 9:6 -- 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.**

Opening: It was a few days before Christmas on the Oregon coast. Two men whose families lived next door to each other opted to go sailing while their wives went Christmas shopping. **An unexpected storm surprised the weekend sailors. Before long, the sea became angry, and the two had a difficult time keeping the sailboat under control**. While heading toward the harbor, the craft hit a sandbar and was grounded. Both men were forced to jump overboard into the cold water so they could push and shove the sailboat into deeper water. As they endured the frigid wind while standing knee-deep in mud and being bounced against the hull of the boat by unfriendly waves, one fellow leaned over and said to the other, "**Hey, sure beats Christmas shopping, doesn't it?**"

I don't know about you, but I, too, can be somewhat disillusioned by all that our secular world has made of Christmas in the last fifty years or so. It's not that I'm opposed to giving gifts to the people I care about. It's just that all of the focus on buying the right presents seems to have reduced the supernatural part of the Christmas story to a mere footnote. I'm sure I speak for many of us when I say that the further Christmas is removed from the celebration of the birth of Christ, the less excited I am about it.

That's why, today, I'm beginning a new preaching series I've decided to call -- **Christmas Through the Eyes of Others. To help us get our focus on the things that really matter, we will, over the next three Sundays and on Christmas Eve, consider what the coming of God's Son into the world LOOKED LIKE to (1) one of the major Old Testament prophets, (2) to God the Father, (3) to the angels, and (4) to Christ Himself.** Let's begin by inviting you to step into the shoes of the nation of Israel about 2,700 years ago, and listen to the words of the prophet ISAIAH. **As God's spokesperson to Judah, he wanted them to know that the promised Messiah of God was coming at some future time, that He would sit on the throne of His father, David, and rule with justice and righteousness forever.** In this passage, Isaiah assigns to the coming King **four titles** that provide us with some insight as to **the character and nature of His rule**. He will be called **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace**. These names speak to us about His wisdom, power, security, and assurance. Let's look at each one together as we prepare our hearts to celebrate His first advent into the world.

Title #1 – Wonderful Counselor – This title speaks of the wisdom of God's plan. The word "**wonderful**" means "**miraculous or extraordinary**." **The writers of the Old Testament used it for acts of God that go beyond human comprehension**. This is how it's used concerning Sarah, the wife of Abraham, when she was told she would have a baby in her old age in **Genesis 18:13-14 -- The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard (wonderful) for the Lord?" For this woman who had been barren her entire life, the news was too good to be true!**

Then there's the word "**counselor,**" which means "**advisor**." Of course, if you've been around a while, you know that someone can give good or bad counsel. For example, the mother of **King Ahaziah**, a woman named **Athaliah**, gave WICKED counsel to her son. As a result, he only reigned one year over Judah before he died (**See 2 Chronicles 22:2-3**). **Here, Isaiah prophesies that the child to be born and on whose shoulders the government will rest will be a marvelous counselor, one who can be completely relied upon in whatever He says**. Those who follow Him will never be led astray. No other person in history could ever claim perfection when it comes to 100% of his or her advice, but **the Messiah will give only the counsel people most need to**

hear. **He will be the perfect teacher, though to think that His plans or ways will ALWAYS BE THE SAME AS OURS is the height of foolishness. This is what the prophet says in Isaiah 55:9 -- For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts**. We should, however, be grateful that this is the case. Think about it. When Jesus came into our world, He didn't operate based on what His followers thought He should do. None of them believed that crucifixion would bring us victory over sin and death. Still, it was God's plan, and Jesus carried it out perfectly.

To summarize the prophecy of Isaiah, then, the Wonderful Counselor will lead His people with perfect wisdom. Those who follow Him will not walk in darkness, but in the bright light of day. **In the tiny child born in Bethlehem, we see all the wisdom of God wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger**.

Title #2 – Mighty God. **It speaks of the power of the coming Messiah to accomplish whatever He desires**. It is a statement of His deity. The baby born in a smelly, cold, and damp stable is God the Son! Earlier in **Isaiah 7:14**, we're told this about the child -- **Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel** (which means "God with Us"). The Apostle Paul says it like this, "**For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form**" (**Colossians 2:9**). The Nicene creed declares that Jesus Christ is "**very God of very God**." Of no other person who has ever lived can this claim be made. HE IS GOD, so much so that Jesus would later say, "**Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father**" (**John 14:9**).

There is something else in this title that we need to recognize. **He is called MIGHTY God**. It means **Powerful, Valiant Warrior**. **It is actually a military title and views Jesus as the God who fights for His people**! Now put the two titles together – Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God – and here's what you get -- **ALL OF HIS MARVELOUS WAYS AND PERFECT PLANS WILL BE CARRIED OUT BY HIS INFINITE MIGHT**. Nothing will stand in His way! Our Lord will accomplish all that He desires.

You get a little glimpse of God's plans and God's power wrapped up in the person of Christ when you look at his arrest in **the Garden of Gethsemane**. According to the Gospel of **John** (**18:4-11**), the soldiers who came to Jesus under the cloak of darkness were carrying weapons when they approached Him. That's when Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "**Who is it you want**?" They replied, "**Jesus of Nazareth**." Our Lord responded, "**I am he**." **When Jesus said**, "**I am he**," **they drew back and fell to the ground**. JUST A SMALL DEMONSTRATION OF HIS MIGHTY POWER, DON'T YOU THINK? A moment or two later, we're told that Peter withdrew his sword and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. **This was his vain attempt to get the outcome he wanted**. What did Jesus do? He commanded Peter, "**Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me**?" THERE WAS NO WAY THAT OUR LORD WAS GOING TO ALLOW ANYONE TO GET IN THE WAY OF THE PLAN OF GOD TO BRING ABOUT THE SALVATION OF MAN. HE WAS TOO WISE TO LET THAT HAPPEN.

POWER AND WISDOM, WISDOM AND POWER. These are two attributes of Christ as prophesied by Isaiah.

Title #3 – Everlasting Father – The Hebrew phrase is literally, "**the Father of Eternity**." This speaks to the purpose of His coming. Let me explain myself. The word "**everlasting**" implies that Jesus is BEFORE, ABOVE, and BEYOND time. He is eternal. He has always been and always will be. He never had a beginning, and He'll never have an end.

He is also a FATHER to His people in the sense that ALL THAT A GOOD FATHER IS TO HIS CHILDREN, JESUS IS TO HIS PEOPLE. **He loves and cares for us in every way**: He **PROVIDES** what we need to get along in life (**John 10:10 – I have come that you might have life and have it to the full**); He is **WITH US** every step of the way (**Matthew 28:20 – I am with you always**); He **PRAYS** for us (**Romans 8:34 -- Christ Jesus is the one who died—**

more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us); He gives us the **STRENGTH** that we need to abide in any circumstance (**Philippians 4:13 – I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**; He **PROTECTS** us (**John 10:11 – I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep**); and He **MODELS** the Christian life for us (**Matthew 16:24 -- If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me**). NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT IT, THAT'S A GREAT FATHER BY ANYBODY'S STANDARD.

And, of course, **He is a father forever** (i.e., Everlasting Father). I had a pretty good dad who I really loved. But he died twenty-six years ago. I am a father to seven kids, but I, too, will die. The thing about Jesus is that He died once for all sin and then rose from the dead that He might bring us with Him to God (**1 Peter 3:18**). My dad couldn't do that for me and I can't do that for my kids, but Christ can! He can give us eternal life (**John 6:40 -- … everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day**). AS OUR FOREVER FATHER, JESUS CONSTANTLY REMINDS US THAT NO MATTER WHAT WE'RE GOING THROUGH IN LIFE, HE'S GOT US AND HE'LL NEVER LET US GO!

In 2015, **27-year-old Denise Peraza** very nearly lost her life in a shooting in **San Bernardino, CA**. Her life was spared, not because the shooters saw her and turned the other way, but because a valiant man named **Shannon Johnson** shielded her body with his own and saved her life. **Listen to her recount the situation**: **Wednesday morning at 10:55 A.M.**, we were seated next to each other at a table, joking about how we thought the large clock on the wall might be broken because time seemed to be moving so slowly. I would have never guessed that only five minutes later, we would be huddled next to each other under the same table, using a fallen chair as a shield from over 60 rounds of bullets being fired across the room. While I cannot recall every single second that played out that morning, I will always remember his left arm wrapped around me, holding me as close as possible next to him behind that chair. And amidst all the chaos, I'll always remember him saying these three words: "**I got you**." **Those were the words that Denise Peraza needed to hear in her greatest time of need. They are the same words that we expect to hear all the time from Christ, BECAUSE HE'S OUR EVERLASTING FATHER**. He promises that He will never leave us nor forsake us. He says to every child of God, "**I got you; I got you; I got you, now and forever**."

Title #4 – Prince of Peace – This title speaks of the effect of His coming. He will remove all peace-disturbing powers and secure peace among the nations (**Micah 5:4-5** – speaking of the one to be born in Bethlehem who would be ruler of the nations -- **And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace**). According to the **WORLD WAR MAP**, there are far more countries involved in **ongoing armed conflicts** than those living in peace. Nearly one million men, women, and children have died in the Ukraine/Russia War alone. Peace seems to be as elusive as ever!

Isaiah 9:6 tells us that **God's plan for world peace focuses on one person --- the baby to be born in a manger in Bethlehem**. When He came into our world, He was able to make believers be at peace with God, and at His second coming, He will usher in a kingdom of peace. Why isn't there peace everywhere today? **Let me assure you that Jesus has not failed in His mission; we have failed Him**. Many still reject His rule and choose to live for their own purposes. The result is increased conflict. But for those who submit to Him as our Messiah, peace is what follows.

So let's review: **HE IS THE WONDERFUL COUNSELOR -- HE LEADS HIS PEOPLE WITH PERFECT WISDOM; HE IS THE MIGHTY GOD -- ALL OF HIS MARVELOUS WAYS AND PERFECT PLANS WILL BE CARRIED OUT BY HIS INFINITE MIGHT; HE IS THE EVERLASTING FATHER -- ALL THAT A GOOD FATHER IS TO HIS CHILDREN, JESUS IS TO HIS PEOPLE AND WILL BE SO FOREVER; HE IS THE PRINCE OF PEACE – HE MAKES BELIEVERS TO BE AT**

PEACE WITH GOD AND WILL, AT HIS SECOND COMING, SECURE PEACE AMONG THE NATIONS. Now that's something I can get excited about every Christmas Season!

Conclusion: In the year **1847**, **A CATHOLIC PRIEST** in a small town in France wanted **A LOCAL POET** who lived in that little village to write a song for Christmas. So, he approached the local poet, a wine connoisseur who also had a reputation for drinking too much. The priest asked him to write the lyrics for a song. Now, the poet was a lyricist and not a composer. So, on a long carriage ride to Paris from that little town, he tried to decide which composer he would approach to write the music for this song. He knew someone who wasn't a Christian. He was **A JEWISH COMPOSER**. But, he thought, "**This would be the perfect person for this particular song**." So, he approached the composer. The composer saw the lyrics, and the composer decided to write the music to it. The song premiered on Christmas Eve in that little town, and it was an instant hit. In fact, that song made its way from town to town, and it even made it to Paris. Fast forward a couple of years, and the one who wrote the lyrics decided that he wanted to leave the faith altogether in order to join the Socialist movement. Now, while it had been concealed that it was a Jewish composer who wrote the music, it was revealed when this man left the faith. So, **THE CHURCH IN FRANCE** outlawed the song because it had been written by a Jewish composer. They barred it from being sung in church. Years later, **A UNITARIAN AMERICAN MINISTER** who was dedicated to the abolition of slavery in the US came across this same song. He liked to collect different songs from different places in the world so that they might be sung and heard in the US. He was especially inspired by this song because of a particular line. As a dedicated abolitionist, he knew the sin of slavery was so pervasive and needed to be eradicated. Perhaps a song could somehow move the needle. There's a line in that song: "**Chains shall he break for the slave is our brother, and in his name *all* oppression shall cease**." So, the song made its way across the ocean, and people began to sing it here. Fast forward to **1906**. **A YOUNG PROFESSOR**, 33 years old, a classically trained violinist, HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY THE FIRST SONG EVER HEARD ON NATIONAL RADIO HERE IN THE STATES. SO, on Christmas Eve, he read from the Gospel of Luke and then performed **O HOLY NIGHT** for an entire nation. **How is it that a song thought up by an anonymous catholic priest, lyricized by a drunk local poet, composed by a Jewish composer who didn't really believe, outlawed by the church, and picked up by a Unitarian minister dedicated to the abolition of slavery, somehow became the first song ever to be heard on national radio**? The answer: God did it. He is, after all, especially good at accomplishing that which seems impossible. Isaiah, the prophet, knew this as well as anyone, for it was God who had revealed to him that a child would one day be born who would rescue us from THE DOOM AND GLOOM OF A FALLEN WORLD, and His name would be **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**.