

Note: Thank Lorraine and company for decorating the sanctuary

Advent: OT: Is 64:1-4 and NT: Luke 1:26-33

Title: For Unto Us a Child is Born

Big Idea: In life we want counsel, but God gives us a Counselor.

Text: Isaiah 9:6

Subject: “Wonderful Counselor” or “A Wonder of a Counselor” (Insight)

Introduction:

Two years ago I picked up my first GPS device. The brand was a Magellan so I decided to call my new friend, “Maggie.” At the time, I thought this thing is cool. You see the streets before you come up to them, mileage to the next turn and even a voice telling you where to go. When I was stuck in traffic, Maggie recommended detours. If I wanted to find the nearest Starbucks, I could type in a request and Maggie would help me get my latte fix. When I visiting people in homes, Maggie would ensure I could the place with no problem. I liked Maggie...that is, until I decided to go at it alone.

There were some occasions where I wanted to venture out on my own. I could figure it out. I had that manly attribute that said, “I can figure this one out.” So I would go my own way. My wife, Janae, would ask that dreaded question, “Do you know where you are going?” “Of course I do” and onward I would go. “This doesn’t look right,” she would say. “Nagh, I know what I am doing.” Then she said, “I am going to turn on Maggie”. Then Maggie tells me, “At your earliest convenience, make a legal U-turn.” Now I have two women after me. Perhaps this device is not as cool as I first thought.

I believe there are times in life we long for a Maggie voice to give us directions especially in these uncertain days. Questions surround all of us. Function questions before us like:

1. What will the stock market do this week?

2. Will my job be here in 6 months?
3. What is going to happen with my mortgage rate? Should I refinance now or wait?
4. How am I going to pay for college for my kids?
5. Where is my retirement going to come from?
6. Should I take more medication, or have that operation or try to manage the pain I currently live with?

And beyond these are a whole series of **relational questions**:

1. Whom should I marry? Or where is that special person in my life?
2. My kids don't seem to embrace the faith like we do. What can I do?
3. My mother is aging and is unable to live alone, what should I do to help her out?
4. My spouse hurt me with those words, what should I do?

Of questions of meaning and purpose like:

1. Why am I here?
2. What contribution does my life make?
3. God, I have lived a full life, why do you still have me here?

Don't you wish that our lives a device that literally us which way to go? Kind of a pocket 8-ball to guide our lives.

As we begin this Advent season, I want us to look at a **familiar portion of Scripture that often surfaces during Christmas, but usually without explanation.** Rather than parking ourselves in the Gospels, I want us to turn the writings of Isaiah and look at Christmas through the lens of a people who longed to see God's promise of a **Messiah 700 years removed.** As we read through passage, I want us to look specifically at the four names of the Christ-child: **"Wonderful Counselor", "Mighty God", "Everlasting Father" and "Prince of Peace".** Each week during Advent, **WE WILL TAKE A NAME, EXAMINE IT MEANING, LOOK TO SEE HOW JESUS FULFILLED IT IN THE GOSPELS and ASK HOW HE IS STILL FULFILLING IT TODAY.** When we are at a crossroad in life, **WHERE DO WE GO and to WHOM DO WE TURN?** This week we will look at the first name **"Wonderful Counselor"** or as Eugene Peterson's writes in the Message: **"Amazing Counselor"**. Turn with me to Isaiah chapter 7 first and then 9.

History of Isaiah:

Isaiah ministered under four kings of Judah: 1) **Uzziah** died 740 B.C., 2) **Jotham** (740-732 B.C.), 3) **Ahaz** (732-715 B.C.) and **Hezekiah** (716-687 B.C.). Early in Ahaz's reign the two nearest northern neighbor kingdoms, **Israel under Pekah** and **Syria under Rezin of Damascus**, formed an alliance bent on conquest of Judah and termination of the reign of the Davidic dynasty by placing a certain "son of Tabeel" (Isa 7:6) upon the throne. To make matters worse, Judah faced invasion from **the Edomites and Philistines in the south**. It looked as if the Davidic monarch was coming to an end. **Nevertheless, God has promised His people He would protect them if they stood strong in their faith.** The Lord sends the prophet Isaiah to encourage their present king **Ahaz** to do so. In this time of national peril and of testing for Ahaz the young king, Isaiah, with holy zeal and great faith, encouraged the king, by the Word of the Lord, promising early deliverance of Jerusalem, if not of the whole land of Judah (**Isa 7:3-9**).

Is. 7:3 ¶ Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out, you and your son Shear-jashub, to **meet Ahaz** at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field.

Is. 7:4 Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood – because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah.

Is. 7:5 Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying,

Is. 7:6 "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it."

Is. 7:7 Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "**It will NOT take place, it will NOT happen,**

Is. 7:8 for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.

Is. 7:9 The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. **If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.'**"

Ahaz has a choice: listen to God through His prophet or take matters into his own hands and fix it himself.

Text:

Verse 1a clearly links up with the end of chapter 8. Despite the fact that Israel had rejected God's word through Isaiah (8:11, 17, 19-20), God has planned to give his people light again, though the timing of this is not specified.

Is. 9:1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali (ANNEX BY ASSYRIA), but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan – (THOSE FIRST TO RECEIVE JUDGMENT ARE THE FIRST TO GET GRACE...BY THE WAY THE BULK OF JESUS' MINISTRY WAS GALILEE)

Is. 9:2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned (PROPHETIC TENSE - STEPS INTO THE FUTURE AND LOOKS BACK. EVENTS ARE CERTAIN BECAUSE THEY ARE DIVINELY PLANNED).

Is. 9:3 (NOTICE THE JOY) You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.

Is. 9:4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

Is. 9:5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

(THE PASSAGE PROMISES TOTAL REDEMPTION BY THE LORD. ISRAEL WILL BE UTTERLY DELIVERED FROM THE OPPRESSOR. BUT NOTICE HOW???)

Is. 9:6 For to us a child is born,

(THE INTRODUCTORY CONJUNCTION "FOR" IS VERY IMPORTANT HERE (V.6). ALL THESE WONDERFUL EVENTS MUST HAVE AN ADEQUATE CAUSE. THE WORD "CHILD" IS IN A POSITION OF EMPHASIS.) to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called (FOUR NAMES: FIRST 2 DIVINE ATTRIBUTES) Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, (THE LAST TWO SET FORTH THE ENDS HE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE EXERCISE OF THESE ATTRIBUTES—HIS FATHERLY CARE OF HIS PEOPLE AND THE BRINGING OF PEACE WITH ALL ITS ATTENDANT BLESSINGS.) Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Is. 9:7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty (OR DIVINE JEALOUSY) will accomplish this.

AHAZ WOULD HAVE TO MAKE US HIS MIND WHERE HE WILL TURN FOR HELP: TO NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES OR TO GOD. ALLIANCE WITH ASSYRIA OR RETURN TO GOD. ISAIAH CALLS AHAZ TO SEEK THE LORD.

No doubt most of our situations here are not a grave as Ahaz, but let's face it, our situations are REAL, they may feel INSURMOUNTABLE, and they do affect us. Like Ahaz, many of us here face a crossroad. Should we go left or should we go right?

Whenever we find our selves at such a situation where we need more insight, we often look FIRST for more FACTS, more EDUCATION, more COUNSEL. We often go to the most informative location on the planet...We go to Google.

In life we want COUNSEL:

Google is not only the name of one of the largest internet company's, it is also a verb on how to gather information on any subject that is available. Type in your topic and away you go with more data than anybody has time to process. I did the word "church" and came up with 310 million hits. In some ways it is so exciting to see at one's finger-tips restaurant information, movies, pricing and ratings on camera's or investing schools or businesses.

The negative side to all is that is the fact we are inundated with more information, on a daily basis, than we can possibly process. We can access people at anytime time through text, email or phone. Add to that all the unwanted messages bombarding us, and one can see that we are swimming in a sea of data. In fact, for me, it is a rest to turn off technology and unplug for a day or two.

We live in an "over communicated" environment. I know the information is probably in my inbox, some web site, this financial report, that policy manual, this legal document, and for us now this home loan paperwork. A glut of information can be Catch-22. **WHILE IT ADDS TO KNOWLEDGE, IT BLOCKS WISDOM.**

WHAT ARE WE DOING WITH THIS INFORMATION? IS IT REALLY ALL-NECESSARY? ARE WE LIVING HAPPIER LIVES? EXPERIENCING FEW PROBLEMS? MAKING BETTER DECISIONS? ARE WE ANY WISER? History tells us that we haven't learned much in spite of all that we know. The situation changes, but the problems remain the same. Clearly, we need to do something better with ALL this information.

T.S. Eliot posed a question: "Where is the wisdom we have lost in the knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in the information?" Where is

this elusive meaning of all this data? How do we get it? First, let's look at four levels of thinking:

1. **Data** - simple facts and figures (toy piece)
2. **Information** - data that is collected and organized. It becomes a reference tool. Something we turn to when we need to create something else. (goes with this piece)
3. **Knowledge** - Information digested, organized, understood and now in a particular context. (instructions and box cover)

We have data...We have information....We have knowledge... The problem many times is NOT that we don't have knowledge, but that we have "limited knowledge" or "skewed knowledge." This information may be helpful with the transaction questions in life, but it does not always help us with meaning.

Problem in our world:

Having more information, a better education and even a higher I.Q. has not stemmed the world from greed, prejudice, pride or selfishness. In fact the Bible says, "Knowledge puffs up." I not saying "ignorance" is a virtue. What I am saying is that more information, more education and degrees, doesn't make us wiser. What we need is Wisdom.

Wisdom - Knowledge is not wisdom. Opinion is not wisdom. Wisdom is the proper use of knowledge. In order to get wisdom, we need something beyond counsel...we need a **Counselor**.

But God give us a COUNSELOR?

We seek counsel **BUT GOD GIVES US A COUNSELOR.**

Ahaz wants to think **politically**; God wants to think **religiously**. Ahaz wants a **bigger friend in his corner** so that he can fend off his intrusive neighbors. God wants him to **stand firm in the faith**. Ahaz thinks he can go at it **alone**. God says, “**Don’t fool yourself.**” God tells Ahaz the answer you seek will never be found in political alliances with Assyria. My answer to the oppression and hostility in this cruel world proud is not a jack-booted warrior, not in a military or diplomatic solutions. **My answer comes ONLY through a child.** Friends you must see this insight for if you miss it you miss the very heart of the Christmas story.

God sees that our problems are fundamentally not of a business nature, not one of economics, nor education, not even one of physical or mental ailments. God sees that the issues in life are fundamentally **RELATIONAL** in nature. That is what God is tell King Ahaz through Isaiah. Your issues are not political, they are **RELATIONAL**. You **THINK** your problem is the your northern neighbors, but the real issues you face Ahaz are **hatred, revenge, prejudice, greed, envy, anxiety, selfishness...sin**. These vices separate you from each other and from Me. The fact is that the all ailments of this world are fundamentally heart issues. Pass what laws you want. Make alliances and treaties. Do it all, but you still need Me. **GOD TELLS AHAZ, THAT THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM YOU FACE CAN ONLY BE RESOLVED IN THE CHRIST-CHILD.** It is **NOT** only a message to an ancient Israelite king. It is a message for you and I today.

When you stare at the manger scene this Christmas and see that young babe, know that all life’s answer converge on that child. God is not going to give us more information, more facts, more counsel. He does not peer over the rail of

heaven and look down and say, “Boy it’s messy down there. They sure have messed things up. Why don’t we send them a manual to go and fix things.” No, God gives us a Counselor, a Personal Guide to walk with you in life. We serve a God who doesn’t mind getting his hands dirty with the muck our lives. He doesn’t change this fallen world. He steps into it and changes us.

1. This Counselor help us with our blurred lens of reality

We see only a portion. God sees it all. We diagnose based on what we know. God diagnoses based upon what He knows. We think we know what is best. God knows what is best. For many of us, our sense of reality is perturbed by the negative experiences in life.

Jesus often showed people they were thinking incorrectly. They came to him with one need and he showed them a bigger reality.

Jesus as an “Amazing Counselor” in the Gospels:

Sometimes we ask the wrong questions

The woman at the well asked for physical water. Jesus quenched her thirst with spiritual water that was living and refreshing.

Friends of a paralytic, a crippled man ask for healing, Jesus forgives his sins.

Nicodemus doesn’t know what to ask for, and Jesus tells him he must be born again.

An invalid of 38 years asks Jesus to put him in the pool of Bethesda, Jesus ask, “Do you want to get well?”

The disciples ask to send the crowds away so they can feed themselves and Jesus showed them that they could feed them.

The disciples rejoice that demons flee at the name of Jesus. Jesus says save your partying for the fact **your name is written in the Lambs book of life.**

My friends, I have come to learn that part of growing up in faith is submitting to the thought that I don’t see everything correctly. We all have blind spots, or worse

yet, spots that we view through a cracked lens. Our Counselor, Jesus can help you and I see what we are unable of seeing.

2. We need a Counselor who teaches us to see this world through the eyes of faith.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God tells Ahaz: **“IF YOU DO NOT STAND FIRM IN YOUR FAITH, YOU WILL NOT STAND AT ALL” (Is 7:9)**

Rather than go to God, Ahaz calls Assyria for help and essentially makes Judah, and the throne of David, a puppet to Assyria and then later Babylon. The spineless Ahaz, in order to save the deteriorating situation, had done the worst possible thing—militarily, diplomatically, spiritually—when he called on the Assyrians for help. Ahaz purchased a false peace at the price of robbing the Temple of all its treasures as well as its most costly furnishings (2 Chron 28:21; 2 Kings 16:8), in addition to draining the national treasury (2 Kings 16:8) and confiscating the resources of leading citizens (2 Chron 28:21). True he would no longer be in danger from Israel and Syria, but in their place the Assyrians threatened the national existence of Judah. He had to accept the position of vassal or tributary king to Assyria. Diplomatically Judah was now fully isolated, without power to exist except by Assyrian sufferance. That meant that he would have no military power except such as the Assyrians would allow him to have; Chronicles summarizes Ahaz’s decision, **“So Tiglath-pilneser king of Assyria came against him, and afflicted him instead of strengthening him” (2 Chron 28:20)**. Thus, the shadow of the Assyrian Empire fell upon northern Israel and southern Judah.

I wish, I just wish, that becoming a Christ-follower would give us immediate and clear understanding to all of life’s questions. Some X-ray glasses that give us the ability to know which stocks to invest in, when to get into the housing market and

when to get out, who to partner and trust in business, what relationships I should let into my life and whether to buy a mac or PC? Ok that one is settled.

Paul describes this inability to discern the pieces of data in this world even for Christians in the following manner. 1Cor. 13:12 (KJV) “**For now we see through a glass, darkly;**” 1Cor. 13:12 (MESSAGE) “**We don’t yet see things clearly. We’re squinting in a fog, peering through a mist.**” As we stand at this crossroad of indecision, we ponder which way we should go. God purposes keeps some facts back so that we can learn to walk by “faith” and not by “understanding”. **The fact is that God has enabled us to see reality through the lens of faith.**

God is always faithful to give us enough information to start us walking, but He never gives us all the information to tell us all that is ahead. Once again, the life of Jesus:

1. Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.
2. Rich young ruler - sell everything and then follow Me.
3. You give them something to eat
4. Peter come...Jesus walking on the water
5. Go into all the world - direction without much detail

Rest assured when you start moving, God starts steering. Sure they may be dead-ends, turn-arounds and road blocks. How I wish that were not so. I wish efficiency was one of the fruits of the Spirit. But God counsels us and steers us through this journey. “The steps of a righteous man are ordered of the Lord” (Prov. 20:24).

Conclusion:

Gary Hausen, in his book *Decision Making and the Will of God*, says that “**man looks for answers; God looks for relationships.**” We do come before an eight ball, Magellen like, old man on the hill who answers our questions. We come before a God who wants relationship with us. **He uses our need for answers to foster relationship with Him.** (Housing story - you pray better when you are in need).

We can so busy trying to process more and more information, that we don't have time for quiet contemplation of sitting before our Lord. Without contemplation, we lose perspective and can lose our grounding. Without our bearings, we struggle to figure out which way to go. Without a Guide, we grow frustrated and confused.

Oh, my dear friends, we don't always know what we need, but our Lord does. We don't need more information. We are drowning in facts. Please don't recommend another seminar, book or class. I need a Guide, someone to show me how to live. Someone who has great insight in this world. Someone who can make sense out of this stuff. Jesus wants to be your personal guide through this troubled world.

There are times in life where we feel we are like a leaf blown by the wind. We do not control our ways. Something outside of us does. Many people in the Bible pray and I hope you will join with them today: **“Show me,” “Lead me,” “Teach me,” “Direct me,” “Instruct me,” and Guide me”**

Wonder:

The root פִּלְאָה primarily signifies something that, **measured by the standards of what people are accustomed to or what they normally expect, appears to be extraordinary and wonderful.** Our God is “Wonder in insight”...

“Wonder in concern”... “Wonder in limitless ability”... “Wonder in His capability to get you from Point A to Point B... “Wonder in all His ways.”

At the heart of Christianity, what we find is neither a philosophy nor a system of morality, but a gospel: good news....that in Christ we have a Wonder Counselor who personally guides us through potholes and pitfalls of life.

This Christmas, when you are at the mall and you can't find that item and you look for help, do you want information on where the item is or do you prefer that someone walk you to the aisle and show you where to go. In Christ, we have such a guide. God gave us a Counselor. The answer to the human dilemma is not a book or a class, but a Person.

Benediction:

Col. 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking **God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.**

Phil. 1:9 **And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,**
Phil. 1:10 **so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,**