

Names of the Messiah

By Kevin Wong and Clifton Jang

Acknowledgements and Credit

The structure for this devotional derives from a book called, *Names For The Messiah: An Advent Study by Walter Brueggemann* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016). We recommend his book if you would like further study. The names for each week and the assigned preaching passage come directly from his book. Many of the overriding themes echo his writings, and we are indebted to this work.

We also wanted to shape the message with personal stories and our own missional context for this devotional reading.

How To Use This Devotional

This devotional is written for the congregation at Cornerstone Trinity Baptist Church in San Francisco. Advent is a time of preparation for the church in anticipating the arrival of God's son. We hope you take time daily to prepare your soul and relive the arrival of our Christ. Each week covers six days and the seventh, Sunday, has space for sermon notes, leading to the advent of Christ, Christmas day.

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Sermon Notes:

“The Wonderful Counselor”

Isaiah 9:2-6 and Luke 1:51-53

Sunday, December 1

Wonderful Counselor
Week 1, Day 2
Monday, December 2

We all need counselors. Whether a friend or confidante, we reach for those who give us insight, counsel, or advice. They give us direction and form the context of our lives. Stated another way, we are merely representatives of the counsel in our lives. Ancient Near Eastern kings had counselors, often in the form of magicians, dream interpreters, or necromancers. Why? Because as in life, we need guidance, especially if we can tap into the power of a higher spiritual being, and for Israel, it was God.

Israel anticipated a wonderful counselor (Is. 9:6), because it marked the deliverance of God's gift to his people. This person would be a testimony of God's works and good deeds for His people.

Jesus fulfills the hopes of a wonderful counselor. In his encounter with his disciples after the resurrection in Luke 24, he explains the scriptures and His glory. He counsels them. His presence created a "fire within them."

How often we seek counsel from the various sources of information in our lives? Not only this, but we seek the approval of others or gain identity from our profession or contributions to companies, families, or communities. The wonderful counselor tells us who we are and who we need to please. He invites his disciples to eat with him and to be with him.

Reflect:

1. How do you seek and anticipate the wonderful counselor?
Relationships are built on anticipation. How do you build an anticipation for God?
2. What would it mean for you to be with God today?

Wonderful Counselor
Week 1, Day 3
Tuesday, December 3

Having children, I often see their wonder. They ask questions like, “why do you drive so fast?” Or “why is Christmas just one day?” “Where did God come from?” Wonder causes us to seek answers. It moves us to reflection, especially if you believe God has done wonders in your life. When I slow down to reflect on the miracle of being born where I am, living in the place I live, and enjoying the gifts we see everyday, wonder leads me to appreciation and gratitude. This helps especially during circumstantial discontentment and worry. We have bills to pay, goals to fulfil and checklists of things to be done. We live at breakneck speeds, often neglecting close relationships and opportunities for personal transformation.

Our lives can lose wonder. We can learn new things and even new languages. We might have the same routines everyday with very little left to the imagination - same school, same desk at work, same time for dinner, etc. Wonder and curiosity flow down the drain of routine and rote memory.

The “wonderful counselor” in Isaiah 9:6 can be literally translated, the “counselor of wonder.” In other words, he will be the one to represent and remind the people of the wonder working power of God’s might and His plans. And in that time in history, a counselor of wonder would bring good news, even good feelings, to the discouraged people. He would be their ever present help in a time of loneliness, isolation, and defeat.

You might be facing a lack of wonder in your life. You might sense in your heart a void that thirsts for curiosity and yearns for a bigger story. Stress saps joy. Tests and exams can steal from the season. Relational scars can replace the freshness of God’s presence.

Fortunately, this season, Christians remember that Jesus arrived in the world as the deliverer of wonder, a rekindling of hope. He became the visible and tangible picture of God's presence and patience.

Reflect:

What areas of your heart lack wonder for God and his works?

Take some time to write about your story and how it's wrapped in God's story. You might highlight important people and relationships that God has placed in your life. Include specific incidences that can only be possible if an almighty God worked them into the fabric of your life.

Wonderful Counselor

Week 1, Day 4

Wednesday, December 4

Lights make this time of year special. Homes with Christmas lights and trees shine in neighborhoods, and some resort to competing with one another for prettiest homes. Some neighborhoods even attract visitors for selfies and pictures. At home, we personally put up a tree and hang lights to celebrate the season. While lights make things “merry and bright,” they also provide clarity for our eyes. They bring light to obstructions and grab our attention. In many ways, light helps our understanding and gives guidance.

Israel’s hopes hinged on light coming into the world by God’s hand for his people. So, it should not surprise us that when we hear of Jesus’ birth, the original tellers speak of a shining star. We sing about it. We herald a “star of wonder.” Why? Jesus even announces that he is the light of the world several times in John (8:12, 9:5). Furthermore, the Jews kept a lamp lit in their temple to represent God’s perpetual presence and help.

The Wonderful Counselor arrives as a light for our life. He shines on darkness. He gives life to dead things. He illuminates our way. This season, we notice areas of darkness that need light. From corners of our neighborhoods that cover secret habits to various ways we shade the corners of our own hearts that blind us to our own self guided, protective acts, we invite the Wonderful Counselor who brings light. He heals and then invites us to lives without secrets (Eph. 5:9-10). This does not mean tell everything to everyone, but rather we try to live lives that are given to others. Some of our closest relationships should hold some of our deepest vulnerabilities. Some are professionally held. Some are held by the bonds of deep spiritual companionship. Nevertheless, we demonstrate our need for the Wonderful

Counselor by our willingness to accept light through prayer and human relationships.

Reflect:

1. Who holds those deepest parts of your soul to show you light?
2. What holds you back from forming spiritual companionship with God and with others?

Wonderful Counselor
Week 1, Day 5
Thursday, December 5

When I think of gladiators, I reminisce about athletes from my childhood. It started with admiring kids on my block or my dad's willingness to wake up at dawn daily for work. As I grew older, I began to take notice of those who seemed to do the impossible. Michael Jordan hitting a game winning shot while fighting the flu or Bruce Willis as a professional miner who, in the words of his son-in-law, "doesn't know how to fail" in the movie, *Armageddon*- as he saves the world and says goodbye to his daughter, blowing up an asteroid destined to destroy earth. Feats of impossibility and overcoming steep odds captivate the imagination. We long for those who carry us through, whether it arrives in the form of our parents, spouses, heroes or legendary characters.

Heroes arrive in all forms. Lately, they have superpowers or embody some hybrid of humanity with human features along with super powers. Israel, similarly cherished their heroes. They were flawed, and the Bible does not shield their flaws. But they did expect a human to rescue them and to teach them (Dt. 18:15). This human would teach them in an unexpected way and lead them to unprecedented heights. Christians believe Jesus fulfills all of those hopes and dreams.

However, Jesus accomplishes his mission unheralded. The religious leaders balk at his "people." They mock his social parties, and they question his miracles. In many ways, Jesus, even in the eyes of other leaders, embodies the anti-hero. He does not grasp for power, and even at his most critical moment with his life at stake before Pontius Pilate, reminds that his kingdom is "not of this world" (Jn. 18:36). Pilate, a person who represented power and had soldiers at his ready, stands stunned and in disbelief. There are times, where even Jesus' own followers strive for power, and Jesus continues the anti-

hero ethic (Mk. 10:42-45). So, while some will say that Christians are turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6), others say they are following Jesus' anti-hero methods (Ph. 2:5-6).

The Wonderful Counselor unmask human counsel and power down to its core- striving and human recognition. Jesus in typical anti-hero fashion, tells stories about losing one's life and becoming a servant. Some will protest in disbelief. Others simply walk away. But others connect the dots with his anti-hero birth and his anti-hero death. The Wonderful Counselor defeats expectations and fancy robes in favor of a servant's cloth.

Reflect:

How does the Jesus story overall paint the picture for your life and deeds?

How is Christmas a story that his humbling and celebratory?

Wonderful Counselor

Week 1, Day 6

Friday, December 6

America believes in education. Our government has a Secretary of Education, and every state in the Union has a department of education. Why? Well, America loves schools, and our budgets, with billions of dollars all have this line item labelled, education. Education empowers, and in many cases opens the doors of knowledge, opportunity, and advancement. It can bring communities together and help the disadvantaged escape their circumstances. Many Americans enroll in colleges and universities for this very purpose.

The Wonderful Counselor's vision pointed to a teacher, feeding the people as a shepherd with the flock. The Psalms paint the picture of leading besides green pastures and the Proverbs through parents to a listening and learning child. Ezekiel sees dry bones in chapter 37 rising to life with words from Israel's prophet who will restore their temple. Hosea seeks people who will love knowledge of God more than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6). Knowledge is truly power. The knowledge of God even better, the bursting and flowing power of God.

The rabbis and teachers of Jesus' time represented knowledge. However, by this time, it was a special knowledge. Jesus characterized it as an oppressive knowledge, bound up by religious regulations that lacked love and true life. This was the life Israel was supposed to have, and Jesus promises it to his followers. While rabbis had students who sat at their feet, Jesus had another kind. Women and others deemed not qualified become part of Jesus' new school of true life. His invitation opened to those with open ears and eyes.

The advent of our Christ is the advent of a Wonderful Counselor and teacher. His teachings are not heavy (Matthew 11:25) and instead are verified

by Jesus' life and teachings (John 8:12-38). They are valuable and more precious than gold. They become the treasure that makes our perishing bodies immortal, though we still see them aging in the mirror. His teachings are more valuable than life insurance policies or the report card that we might look for verification of worth. They speak more loudly than "likes" on the internet or the spark of the eye from romantic love.

The Wonderful Counselor has come. He has given us his teaching. We are truly now living.

Reflect:

What value do you place on possessing Christ's teaching in your life?
Why have so many both those who believe and others who are skeptical by Jesus' life and teaching?

Wonderful Counselor

Week 1, Day 7

Saturday, December 7

I first witnessed a protest in college. It was not spectacular. I did not protest. But I do remember the passion and anger. I do not even remember the particular issue. Later in my college years and after 9/11, I recall the frustration with our government. While other parts of the country vaulted into a wave of patriotism, San Francisco State students protested against the use of violence and powerful bombs to avenge America's loss of life. They saw America's wars as a ploy to invade other countries and even steal oil.

Governments seem to be a part of life. They can be benevolent. But they can also abuse power and turn to violence. They can give their people freedom, or they can use technologies against their own people. The Wonderful Counselor in Isaiah 9 would have the government on his shoulder. On the other hand, his own government would be everlasting peace. What was Isaiah talking about?

Jesus clarifies the picture when he arrives proclaiming a kingdom. And in that time, a kingdom was a government. This is not to say that Jesus wants to form a government like the nation states we see today with elaborate buildings or a great slew of ambassadors and representatives. He was not trying to gain countries or write treaties. He brought a different and everlasting kingdom. He would tell his disciples before he left earth, my peace I give to you (John 14:27). This would be a different government.

Some today advocate for Christians to bring about more change. Some may even think that "being about Jesus is being about social justice." And surely, being about Jesus does not exclude things like helping the poor or volunteering to help others with less opportunity. It does not exclude Christians around the world trying to impact governments for Jesus' sake.

However, it also does not exclude trying to influence the world for Jesus' "government." And I do not refer to some form of a country or building or nation with the Christian flag, but rather trying to influence the world so that Jesus is actually governing. Proclaiming Jesus as Lord to those who do not know is pronouncing Jesus' "government." This is advocating that Jesus is in charge. Leading a child to think about Jesus as a real person is of his government. Helping people find their citizenship in the kingdom of God rather than in the kingdom of money or greed is advancing the governing of Jesus. Finally, representing Jesus in words and deeds is pronouncing the kingship of Christ. Laying down the governments of our heart to the overriding government of Jesus in acknowledging pride, stubborn habits, and ridding of self announces Jesus' kingship.

Reflect: How are you advancing the Jesus' governing in your life?

Sermon Notes:

“Mighty God”

Isaiah 2:6, Mark 1:21-28, John 20:28

Sunday, December 8

Mighty God

Week 2 Day 2

Monday, December 9

The word *mighty* means “possessing great and impressive power or strength, especially on account of size.” When I was younger, my friends and I often would ask each other weird questions. One of those questions was, “If you could have any power, what would you choose?” Some people would choose the ability to fly, some would choose to be super strong, and I would always choose invisibility. I thought it would be so cool to walk around, and no one would know I was there. I could walk in and watch a movie for free. I could walk into a bank, go behind the teller, and just take whatever money I wanted. I could go into school and change all my grades without the teacher knowing.

The Israelites were awaiting their king that was prophesied many years ago in the Isaiah scriptures. If indeed their king was to be almighty, they need no longer fear. If he was to be all powerful, he could break them free from their bondage. He could drive away and defeat any enemy forces. They could now be the big kid on the block. They could be the one doing the bullying to all those who bullied them.

There’s a line in an old Spiderman movie that says, “with great power comes great responsibility.” Yes, this coming King Jesus was to be mighty. He would prove his might with his mighty miracles and awesome demonstrations of power. But, what really did Jesus come to do? What was His mission? If not to rescue the Israelite people and defeat all kingdoms, then what? What was the purpose of his great might? The power I would choose to have was to benefit me. So I could have the things I wanted. But in reality, Jesus’ mission here on earth was never about just the Israelites. He came to set free the bondage of sins for all of humanity. He came to bring peace to a hostile world. And He came to offer salvation to the world. And that is good news!

While Jesus came to not be the bully, we no longer have to fear or be scared of the bullies. Guilt, shame, insecurity, or anxiety. When these lies are whispered to us, we can look to the mighty God standing beside us. We can feel peace and security knowing who our God is that we face this world with. Jesus is mighty. He is mighty to save.

Reflection:

- Take a few minutes and dwell on the might of our God. Think about how powerful He is. Does this change your confidence in facing the unknown future of tomorrow? Why do we fall into fear of the future?
- Spend the next 5 minutes in prayer and thank Jesus for being mighty. Try and list out the ways you would describe Jesus as being mighty.

Mighty God

Week 2 Day 3

Tuesday, December 10

Jesus came to call people to repentance and warn them that the Kingdom of God was at hand. He claimed to be the Son of God. What bold claims! But why should people believe Him?

I often hear my own kids make claims. I can do this. I can do that. My youngest daughter came home one day and told me that one of her friends told her that she could serve the ball overhand and could spike the ball. My immediate reaction? Prove it! I told her to tell this girl to prove it. If she said she could do it, then go ahead and prove it. I think is some, Jesus' detractors, were also yelling at him to prove it. You're the Son of God? Prove it. You have the power to forgive sin? Prove it. Says who? You can't say that.

In Mark 1, Jesus comes across an unclean spirit. In their confrontation, the spirit immediately recognizes Jesus and His power. The unclean spirit knows Jesus has the power to annihilate and destroy this spirit. Jesus quietly exerts his authority and power and says, "Be silent and come out of him." The unclean spirit reluctantly obeys.

In Mark 4, there is a great storm. Jesus is fast asleep at the bottom of the boat. The other people on the boat begin to panic. But when Jesus finally awakes, he merely tells the waters to, "be still." The crowd's reaction? Who is this man that even the wind and the sea obey Him?

Jesus proved it. He proved who He said He was. His claims and what He came to do. Over and over again, with His mighty works, He left no room for doubt, that He was this mighty God the people had been awaiting. As I look back on my own life, I can see the countless times I've ask Jesus to prove it. And how each and every time, He does. He proved it on the cross. He

proved it with the empty tomb. He's proved it in our lives. We have a Savior who is mighty. We have a King we can trust.

Reflection:

- Think back. How often do we ask Jesus to prove it? Do we still ask Him?
- What causes you to doubt Jesus? The same Jesus whom unclean spirits and the raging waters have to obey.
- Spend a few minutes praying to Jesus and thanking Him for His mighty works and His mighty ways proving that He is indeed God and indeed worthy of our trust.

Mighty God

Week 2 Day 4

Wednesday, December 11

Sometimes in today's world, it takes a lot of amaze us. With the Instagram and Facebook and technology, it takes a lot to wow me. I scroll through videos trying to make me laugh or get me to be shocked. So that I will like it or share it. Whether it's a grandpa dancing to hip hop, or a cute dog saving a child from falling into the water, we're living in a world where our attention spans are shorter, and our awe factor takes more and more. Today's question. Does simply reading about Jesus cause us to be in awe and wonder? Does thinking upon Jesus and what He's done cause us to fall down in worship?

Let's take a look at the second word in the phrase Mighty God. We've talked a bit the last few days about Jesus being mighty. But let's focus in on the second word of this phrase. God. Read that again. God. Maybe that doesn't strike any kind of response or emotion. But let's pause and think about the fact that Jesus was God. Jesus is God. This mighty man named Jesus. He had might. He performed miracles. He healed the sick. That guy is God. The God of the Old Testament. The same God who made the world and its people. The same God who you couldn't look at or you'd burn up and die. That same God sent Himself down in the form of a human being. He sent himself down, not to show His power and force people to submit to Him. But he sent Himself down to save us. To die on a cross for us. To feel physical pain and experience death on a cross.

Jesus wasn't just a human being and then God infused some of His power into Him. Jesus was God. God was Jesus. In the beginning (John 1), that in the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. And He was in the beginning with God. The Word being referred to here is Jesus. He was there with God in the very beginning. Jesus

was part of this crazy grand plan from the beginning that God had. I don't know about you, but that is mind blowing. (←- insert mind blown emoji) Sometimes, the idea of the Trinity is something I still cannot comprehend. How is God one, but three distinct persons? How does that even work? I don't know. But something I hold onto is that I'm glad that there are things about God I can't understand. If I could understand and explain everything about God, what does that say about the God I worship? I want Him to be so big, and so powerful, and so mighty, that there are just something that my puny human brain cannot understand.

Reflection:

- Spend a few minutes and try and imagine and picture God. And then know that whatever you thought of, God is bigger, more powerful, and infinitely more loving than any picture you just painted. That same God sent Himself down to earth to dwell among us. He sent Himself down to die for us. And then spend some time praying. Whatever your time thinking about Him causes you to want to say. Say it!

Mighty God

Week 2 Day 5

Thursday, December 12

I think if I had to pick my all time favorite TV show, it would have to be Game of Thrones. I know, I know...the last season wasn't that great. There's some gratuitous stuff in there. But overall, I really loved it. It was a show about different families or houses all fighting to win the Iron Throne. To rule the 7 Kingdoms. They would plot and backstab to try and win this Game of Thrones and rule over the entire realm. They would use their power and force others to bow down. There's a character named Daenerys Targaryen, the Mother of Dragons. What's interesting about her is that she is pretty powerful. She can ride dragons. She's smart. But her ultimate undoing in the end was, how she tried to bring forth her kingdom. Each and every time she was faced with mercy or force, she always choose force. She didn't want to be seen as weak. She preached against oppression, but choose in the end to oppress.

I know what you're all thinking now...Clifton really likes this show. Yes, but hopefully there is a point. :) Hopefully by today, if there's something we can see, its that God is pretty big and powerful. Jesus was this mighty God prophesied. Jesus' mission included proclaiming His kingdom here even on earth. Jesus was God and He had the power to bend us all into submission. Into His kingdom. But he doesn't. His kingdom was not a kingdom based on fear and force. It was of love and grace. And as we look back on the bible, we see that each time God was face with the choice or mery or force, unlikely Daenerys, He always choose mercy. Sure there are consequences for sin, but as I read the bible, what is overwhelmingly clear is that God's goto seems to be love, grace, and mercy. Our mighty God did not want to rule His kingdom with force and fear. But he wanted hearts to willingly trust Him as King. He wanted people own their own want to pledge fealty and submit their lives out of a love for their mighty King.

Our Jesus came down to establish His kingdom in the hearts of men and women. The fact that God Himself came down to dwell with us is amazing enough. But now He dwells in each of us who proclaim Him King,, and we are an extension of that Kingdom. A King, who because of His love, I choose willingly to trust and follow. That's a Kingdom I want to be part of. I'm House Jesus forever.

Reflection:

- What does it mean to you to be part of God's kingdom?
- Kingdom's are communal, not individual. What does that look like for you to be part of a kingdom. That God's design is for people to be in communion with God together. Not just individually. But He is our God, and we are His people.
- Pray and thank God that He rules with grace and mercy, instead of fear and force. Pray that God also changes us to be agents of this grace and mercy.

Mighty God

Week 2 Day 6

Friday, December 13

I think there probably comes a time in every person's life where they begin to question the rules of the house. Growing up in my parent's household, I was a pretty obedient kid. Whatever they told me to do, I just listened and did. Then somewhere around high school I began questioning them. Things they had always told me, I began to think, "why should I listen?" I rebelled and purposely tried to disobey to push the boundaries. I tested the limits of my parent's patience. I had always done what I was told just because. And now that I was a bit older and probably more prideful and arrogant, I didn't want to just listen just because. In the end, I realized what a punk I was. I didn't agree with everything, but I did respect them and knew just how much they loved me.

There's a time we all have to decide for ourselves which household we want to live under. Which kingdom to be under. Which king to follow. In preparation for the coming of our Mighty God, we can reflect on this. Jesus gives us all a choice in who to follow. Maybe you have been going to church as far back as you can remember. Maybe it was your parents who dragged you to church each Sunday. Maybe this whole Jesus thing is pretty new and fresh. Or maybe it's been a while since you've come face to face with Him. Whatever the situation of life you are in, know this....Jesus wants you to choose Him. The same way He choose you. Not out of guilt. Not out of habit or complacency. Our King Jesus is too mighty for that. To choose to follow Him because we know for ourselves the goodness of our Savior. We have experienced for ourselves the depths of His love, and the limitlessness of His grace and mercy. To choose to live under His authority knowing our King loves and wants to lavish us with His finest.

The truly amazing part of this is Jesus knows. Jesus knows there will be times we choose to walk away from that. He knows there are times we choose to live under our own authority and not His. Despite all this. Despite our sin, Jesus continues to pursue us. He will not withhold His reckless love. He leaves the 99 to pursue the 1. (Luke 15:4) This is love of our King. His love is mighty. His grace is mighty.

Reflection:

- Spend some time reflecting on Jesus' relentless love. How has God shown His relentless pursuit of you in your life? Even when you run away...
- Spend a few minutes praying and say to God whatever is on your heart.

Mighty God

Week 2 Day 7

Saturday, December 14

I remember the very first time I ever played guitar for a church worship service. It was for a Christmas service. The worship leader just casually walked up to me and said, “hey, don’t you play some guitar?” “Um, a little,” I said. “Cool, why don’t you help and play today.” I was terrified. I wasn’t even good at it. I picked up a little bit in High School, and when I had my first daughter, I spent some of the little down time I had trying to pick it back up. But I wasn’t nearly ready to play in front of people. There were some chords I couldn’t even play. But here this guy was ready to let me try. I gave it a shot. I won’t lie. It was pretty rough. But I got better. I’m still not great, but much better than before. All cuz this worship leader gave me a chance. I didn’t earn it. I didn’t have to try out.

As disciples of Christ, here’s the cool thing. Jesus was God sent down to earth in human form. God’s son. The mighty God the world was waiting for. But you know what else Jesus was doing? He was preparing His disciples. See, it wouldn’t just be Jesus doing all the work. For all the healing and miracles Jesus did, He also allowed the disciples to participate. He commissioned them to heal the sick. (Luke 10:9) He gives them authority and power to perform great wonders. And the very last thing Jesus does before He goes back to the Father is tell give them a mission to carry out what He started. To take Jesus’ message of love, hope, and grace to the ends of the world. And that mission is passed down to you and I even today. We get to take part in what our mighty God is doing in the world.

And not only that. He leaves us the Holy Spirit to accomplish and do His will. Where we fall short, the Holy Spirit fills in the gap. Where we are weak, the Holy Spirit makes us strong. We were given the same power that

raised our mighty God from the dead. That's what we're working with! As Christians, we aren't made to simply sit back and watch. We were made to worship. And we were made to participate on this team we're on.

Reflection:

- How do we view our mission given to us by God? Optional? A privilege? Chore?
- On most days, what strength and power do we rely on? Our own? The Holy Spirit?
- Spend some time in prayer and talking to God about our part in His work. Thank God for giving us the Holy Spirit.

Sermon Notes:

“Everlasting Father”

Isaiah 63:16, John 14:18

Sunday, December 15

Everlasting Father

Week 3, Day 2

Monday, December 16

I descend from a family of military service. My maternal grandfather served in World War II, and my father served in the Navy during the Vietnam War. I do not hear many stories, but having a legacy of service certainly shapes my view of dedication and loyalty. I have teared up during commercials for medical insurance for military veterans. I have witnessed this kind of dedication and consider it a part of my own story.

Israel's legacy came from its own "fathers." God would even identify himself to his leaders as the "God of your fathers." For this reason, the various genealogies in both the Old and New Testaments serve as a reminder of a spiritual legacy, namely that God is their Father. What does it mean for God to be involved so intimately with their history? It protects, inspires and reminds. In their crucial moments, Israel was supposed to recall that God heard their cries. During their crises of famine or religious fatigue, they would draw inspiration and wisdom from their covenant agreement with their God- Father. And in moments of straying from the agreement and subsequent suffering, they were to remind one another of the terms and the ways to re-enter the agreement. This Fatherly protection provides sustenance that reflected feeding and nourishment that leads to wisdom for living and praise from other nations.

When Jesus proclaims himself to be God or that believing him meant believing the one who sent him, he proclaimed himself a bodily representation of these promises (John 14:23-24). He was the everlasting one. He is closing the loop as the Father finally, through Israel's fathers and their history, sends His Son as a bookend to the story of God's saving history. And this time, his legacy is not just for a nation, Israel, but rather for the universal race of all people, not marked by physical things like circumcision or adherence to a

particular Israeli covenant but instead a spiritual rebirth and marking of the heart.

You can be a part of this legacy too. When we involve ourselves in people's lives as a result of Jesus' calling, we imprint ourselves into this spiritual history. Communities become impacted and neighbors find joy. Relatives find true kinship and loved ones experience sacrificial love. Essentially they find the story of Jesus and the everlasting Father living in their midst.

Reflect:

What is your spiritual heritage? Did it start with someone sharing with you or was it something even bigger?

What communities can be a part of Jesus' movement as his history overlaps with yours?

Everlasting Father

Week 3, Day 3

Tuesday, December 17

After a disaster like the California wildfires or hurricanes on the East Coast, survivors are left with picking up the pieces of their household, scarred by fire or water damage. While insurance might replace the old things, the very few things that survive the torrents become treasures of strength and endurance. The mantra, “very few things last in this world,” rings deeper and provide a picture for our histories. Personally, I can think of very few things that have lasted even the test of regular life. I have driven multiple cars that eventually fade, donated books that outlast their usefulness on my shelf, and recycled clothes that tore at their fabric after years of wear and tear. Very few things are everlasting.

The story of God tells the story of an everlasting God. He not only says he himself is everlasting, but his words are also everlasting. Everlasting civilizations, technologies, wars, kings, rebellions, and even unfaithful worshippers, this everlasting God survives the test. He says to his people who deny him, I do not need your sacrifices and fake dedication and invites true worshippers to mirror his everlasting nature. In the book of Acts, one of the first Christians who gives his life for Jesus’ resurrection story, recounts this everlasting story of an everlasting God to his own people who were supposed to have an everlasting sense of his everlasting presence. But they reject it.

However, because an everlasting love comes from an everlasting God, His people do not stall in a stalemate of suffering or exile. Their troubles are not pointless. He does not sit as an apathetic actor on the stage of careless conquerors. He enters into the world with His people, and even becomes a victim of its selfishness and starve for power. Jesus as the everlasting Son of the everlasting Father enters stage left only to die at the center of the story, thus

telling the story of everlasting love from an insider's perspective. He is not only the narrator but the main actor.

His people then, captured by this story enter into this world, seeing its brokenness, take up the account as witnesses. Consuming them, the rescue of the everlasting God shapes their minds and their world. Their suffering with and for Jesus transforms from endless and pointless rage to hopeful gaze and anticipating hearts. They enter hard places like their Christ and take the story as their guarantee of a better home and a fuller promise.

Reflection: How is everlasting love your guide in your personal life? How does everlasting love shape your relationships and drive towards life pursuits?

Everlasting Father

Week 3, Day 4

Wednesday, December 18

In 1984, a British film called *The Killing Fields* illustrated the story of two journalists who escaped Cambodia in 1973. The nation had fallen under an oppressive regime who dominated the country, resulting in one of the largest genocides in history. I remember watching the film as a child, and it was the first time I was awakened to the abuse of children. One scene depicted one of the government leaders teaching the children never to trust anyone, even their own family. The Khmer Rouge has since fallen, however, its effects still linger today. Pastor Clifton has told me stories about his experiences in Cambodia, particularly its neglect of children, and the stories wrench my heart like clanging metal on concrete. And these are not unique to Cambodia. It happens in the United States through sex trafficking and other means of neglect. This makes us wonder, where are the adults? Where are the parents? For many, the tragedy is the participation of the parents.

God hears their cries. God sides with orphaned children and those who suffer. It should not surprise us then that on multiple occasions, God, as king, sides with stranger and orphan (Zec. 7:10, Jer. 22:3). As Bruegemann states wonderfully in his book, “For this reason the new king coronated in Jerusalem is to be the ‘Everlasting Father,’ the one who guarantees the well-being for the family, clan, or tribe, and eventually the state. The covenantal language of ancient Israel’s faith recognized that society cannot prosper and flourish unless there is responsible attentiveness toward the needy and the vulnerable. The failure of kings to perform this fatherly duty can only end in trouble for all parties” (p. 40) In other words, the Everlasting Father was not only Father to Israel but especially to the vulnerable, orphans and strangers.

In Advent, we recognize God’s ongoing work of protecting and helping the vulnerable. From ministries in San Francisco like City Team to our helping

of elderly, we stand up as those who represent the Everlasting Father. Other international ministries carry the mantle of helping orphans and helping those enslaved in trafficking. The Everlasting Father gave His Son that His people would delight in carrying out his work (Matthew 25).

Pray: Father, you are my Everlasting Father. As I consider all that you have rescued me from, I look toward those who are still trapped in the various systems of the world. Give me courage both to act toward and advocate for those who are vulnerable, for you see all and know all. Keep me close to this mission.

Everlasting Father

Week 3, Day 5

Thursday, December 19

When I was ten years old, my family visited my father's former home in Hong Kong, and it was the first time I realized how my American upbringing differed from my relatives. I did not speak the language, appreciate the weather, or understand my surroundings. In many ways, I was lost. When we returned home to San Francisco, I could only recognize that I was not an immigrant. I cannot appreciate the hardship of trying to learn a new language and culture. I do not have to adapt to a new way of thinking or a lifestyle different from my childhood. However, for many people in Western countries, immigration forms reality. The past life is gone and must assimilate to a new one. A new language with new customs replaces the familiar. Food becomes foreign and one's previous culture clashes with the new.

Christian conversion for many is very similar to this experience. In fact, the apostle Paul describes Christian conversion as an adoption into a new life with the Father (Rom. 8:15) or a new citizenship as into a new country (Eph. 2:15-17). Paul will even say this to Jews who were finding security as God's children in Jewish identity (Gal. 3:25-27). Life with the Everlasting Father is a cross over into a new land. It pushes the boundaries of the old life and introduces a new one.

This can be uncomfortable because it means that a former life becomes obsolete. By no means does Christianity eradicate culture, but it does transform minds and thinking processes. Christianity, in fact, has adapted to international cultures more rapidly than many religions and ways of thinking. How has the Jesus life transformed us?

Many might be surprised that in numerous surveys, non-Christians have a hard time seeing the difference between them and Christians. Perhaps,

we have a hard time immigrating into the kingdom of Jesus. Consumer products, internet surfing, and other American “goods” can double as spiritual idols and life stealers. Immigration requires a remembrance of the past but also an eye towards the destination. As those with not only a new nation, but a new Everlasting Father’s heritage, we remember that we were once spiritual orphans now adapting to a new home.

Pray: Everlasting Father, show me parts of my heritage that are still alive but need to be surrendered. Open my heart to new forms of identity in you and your mission. Consume my vision and cause my soul to be still to your moving in this Advent season.

Everlasting Father

Week 3, Day 6

Friday, December 20

Strength comes in many forms. In my twenties, I noticed strength in those who could push a weight or undergo transformation through physical training. After my wife gave birth to three children, I now understand strength as the ability to nurture a human being within the confines of your flesh, undergo physical changes including swelling and indigestion, and expel flesh, blood, and bone from your body. I cannot comprehend how women bore children before modern medicine. Not only this, I experience the need for strength to provide nurture and care for children after they exit a womb. Scientifically, they require cuddling, sweet talk, changing, clothing, and feeding. To finish it off, they need help with learning letters, words, coping with the world, and adjusting to the cruelty of siblings, if they receive that privilege.

It is quite a wonder that God would call himself Israel's helper. As Father, he takes on what some would call a motherly role. Eve is called Adam's "helper," and God as Father calls himself helper (Ps. 118:7), and Israel envisions kings who are helpers (Ps. 72:12). Helping and nurturing are synonyms to describe God's care as Father. While we might engender Father as masculine as mother as feminine, God shows his care as both father and mother (Is. 49:15, 66:13). He takes care of his people, is their Helper, and brings comfort.

In a world that needs helpers, we remember our identity of those who have received help. Jesus himself tells his disciples that they are not orphans because He will be with them. They take care of an "orphaned world" (Bruegemann, p. 46). The Advent announces a bigger help larger than programs of self help or government programs of relief. It taps into resources larger than any medical plan and transcends the council of any ruler. The good

news of Jesus shouts the announcement that we are not orphaned souls wandering a disconnected planet. Social networks or other networks cannot bring belonging to a world longing for deeper connection. Only the Everlasting Father can call the reunion.

Reflect:

How does your openness to others demonstrate a relationship to the Everlasting Father? Who needs to hear this message about a caring Father who is searching for orphans?

Everlasting Father

Week 3, Day 7

Saturday, December 21

As someone who enjoys personal challenges, I hesitated when someone suggested that pastors take a 72 hour personal retreat annually. What if I disappear and no one finds me? What if I wander so far off the grid, that wild animals hunt me down? But I was up for a challenge and had time for a 60 hour retreat. In that time, I rested, reflected, and talked to myself a lot. I walked a labyrinth, took a hike, and ate silent meals. And I also experienced loneliness from people and the presence of God in a different way. I could sympathize with those abandoned by circumstance and longing to have a conversation with anyone. I could also sympathize with monks who felt closer to God by withdrawing from people.

It does not have to be one or the other. However, there are times when we feel isolated from God. On his last moments on earth, Jesus tells his disciples, as he is readying for the cross and preparing them for his absence, that they will not be alone (John 14:15-21). He will grant them a “helper” who will guide them with his words. Later Christians will later understand this as the Holy Spirit. Christ grants the Spirit from the Everlasting Father, and collectively, they embody God’s working in their midst and in their lives.

So often, I forget that church is not a sanctuary room or worship hall gathered for singing like an exhibition. It is a testimony to the world that God has left His work and craftsmanship for today (Eph. 2:10). Jesus’ disciples, founded on the confession of Jesus as Lord of this world, work in the power of the Everlasting Father’s Spirit to both exhibit and announce a new working. The New Testament book of Acts shows how this contagious aura influences the world and spreads to regions unknown.

Christ's followers today gather around this power today. We are witnesses who hold these stories close to heart and make it a priority not only to tell it, but to bleed it into our souls so as to become an anchor of hope and transformation. We periodically experience loneliness from people to experience fellowship with God. We also periodically experience togetherness with one another to bring fellowship to strangers. Why? Because we have this helper in our lives.

Questions:

What are your means of fellowship with God? What are your means of fellowship with the people of God? What are your means of fellowship with strangers?

Sermon Notes:

“Prince of Peace”

Isaiah 9:6, John 14:27, 16:33

Sunday, December 22

Prince of Peace

Week 4 Day 2

Monday, December 23

Prince of Peace. The coming Messiah was called, Wonder Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and now Prince of Peace. If you were to imagine this coming prince, and He was to save the Israelites and the world, what do you picture? Trumpets blowing announcing His arrival? Celebrations throughout the kingdom? But that's the thing about Jesus. He turns everything we think we know upside down.

He would come into the world in a stable. As a baby. Their family would have to flee for their safety. How would this baby grow up to become our Prince of Peace? God doesn't operate on the wisdom of men. He is God. All the prophecies about the Messiah. His plan to save the world from their sins from the very beginning in Genesis. It would be fulfilled in this baby boy named Jesus. God's will cannot ever be deterred. Not by me. Not by people. We messed up His perfect plan by rebelling against God. We created the need for peace by becoming hostile towards God. The bible says we were once objects of wrath (Eph. 2) to God. And peace God would bring. He would bring it in this baby born in a manger.

Peace would come not through war. Peace would come in the sacrifice of God Himself for us. This Prince of Peace, would have to bear all the wrath of God that was supposed to be directed at us. He took it all so that there could be peace. He would grow up to die on tree so that we there reconciliation between humanity and God. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves. As there are only a few days left before we celebrate the birth of our prince, let's us remember His sacrifice for us so that there could be peace!

Reflection:

- Spend some time reflecting on what it costs for there to be peace between you and God.
- Does our celebration on December 25th reflect the celebration deserved for our prince of peace?
- Pray

Prince of Peace

Week 4 Day 3

Tuesday, December 24

In my house, you can tell when things are not the way it should be. Whether there's a fight between my 2 daughters, or the house is super messy, or there's a cabinet door that needs fixing. I can tell when there's something off. If I walk into the room, I can immediately sense when my 2 daughters aren't getting along. My wife and I have this rule. No matter what time it is, if we are arguing, we won't go to sleep until things are resolved. Does that mean we always agree? Nope. But we can come to some agreement to disagree and try to see things from a different perspective. And sometimes, we don't end up going to sleep for a while. :)

Peace isn't just the absence of conflict. It's when everything is the way it is supposed to be. True peace isn't winning the battle at any cost. Peace isn't beating your opponent down into submission. Peace that our prince Jesus brings is different. The Hebrew word used for peace here is shalom. Shalom is more than just no war. Shalom means harmony, wholeness, well being, tranquility, etc. It is the state of being where all things are the way it should be. And that is what Jesus came down to earth to do. To bring peace. To set the earth and all its inhabitants back to the way it was intended to be. To bring Shalom to the world.

I see things in the world every day that I think shouldn't be. Sickness. Poverty. Wickedness. Natural disasters. Inequality and oppression. You know what? I think Jesus would agree. And He is working to bring Shalom. To make right these things that are wrong. That because of sin, our world isn't right. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. The Prince of Shalom. And ultimately, to bring shalom to our hearts. See, humanity not being with God isn't right. It's not how things are supposed to be. Shalom is needed. Because of sin. Things aren't right. But Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting

Father, came down to make this right. Not by winning a war. But by dying on a cross. Submitting to death. He would bring shalom to offer it to the world for all those who would receive it. His presence in the world and in our lives brings this shalom.

Reflection:

- Take some time to reflect on our broken world. What do you see that isn't right? That isn't the way it should be?
- Take some time to reflect on your brokenness. What do you see that Jesus made right? How did He bring shalom to you?
- Pray and thank Jesus for being the Prince of Peace. The bringer of Shalom.

Prince of Peace

Week 4 Day 4

Wednesday, Dec. 25

Christmas Day! It's here! The air is crisp and cold. Presents under the tree waiting to be opened. Preparations for a huge feast is awaiting. There's a sense of thankfulness and love. There's something different about this day. Maybe there's hot chocolate. Or maybe there's cider. It's such a happy day for most. It's for sure my favorite holiday.

The day is finally here. But what exactly are we celebrating? We've gone through 4 weeks of advent. Advent is a time of preparation. So what have we been preparing for? We have been preparing ourselves for the coming of Jesus. Our Wonderful Counselor. Our Mighty God, Everlasting Father. And finally our Prince of Peace. We have been reminded for the last 4 weeks of who Jesus is. What His mission was. What He came to do for the world. This is who we celebrate. We celebrate that there is a God in heaven whose love is so deep for His people that nothing would stop Him from being with us. When sin caused a separation, God sent Jesus. This is what we celebrate today. Despite our rebellion, God still shows grace and mercy. We rejoice because of this. Even though our world is broken, we know Jesus will one day bring shalom and make all things right. This is what we celebrate. Joy to the world, The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King. Today we celebrate Jesus. The Messiah.

And so, what have we been preparing? It's not just about today. December 25th, 2019. Not just to celebrate this one day and move on with our lives. We prepare our hearts, our minds, and our souls. We prepare for the coming of our King to reign forever in our hearts. To give him a hold over our hearts and lives and all things. We remind ourselves of all that Jesus is and all He will continue to do. And it is this love. And it is this grace that changes

lives forever. This is what we celebrate today. We celebrate with remembrance. We celebrate with worship and adoration. And we celebrate with a transformed life. The fruit of Christ reigning over our lives is transformation and sanctification. He is the Prince of Peace. Now the Holy Spirit makes us agents of peace. He brings supernatural love and forgiveness to us. We are to be extensions of this love and forgiveness. We don't just celebrate with our words. But we honor Him with our lives that are changed by Him. Not by our own doing and strength. But by His grace and the working of the Holy Spirit in us. Merry Christmas! Our Savior reigns.

Reflection:

- Spend some time and think about what you want this Christmas day to be about. What should it look like.
- How do you celebrate Jesus today? Who will you tell about Jesus today?
- Spend some time in prayer and in worship of our Savior and King. If you have family or loved one around, maybe do this together.