

30 November 2005
Advent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“And His name shall be called Wonderful”

Text: Isaiah 9:2-7; Matthew 21:14-17

For our midweek Advent services this year, we'll be taking a look at three of the names given to Jesus in Isaiah chapter 9, and printed on the cover of the bulletin. This text from Isaiah is traditionally read on Christmas Eve, and so looking at these names now will help us prepare for Christmas, as we meditate on our Saviour and all that He has done for us. And tonight, we will consider the first of the names in that list – the name *Wonderful*.

Now, when I first started thinking about that name, what popped into my head was the popular Christmas song we hear so much, that tells us: *It's the most wonderful time of the year*. And that's true, according to Isaiah! But while the song tells us it's because *there is much mistle-toeing, and hearty ho-hoing, and loved ones are near*, Isaiah tells us the real reason: it is because the Wonderful One is here. The Wonderful One is born to us. The One whose very *name* is Wonderful is now wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

“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 . . .”

Now some Bible translations you read will combine this name with the next in the list, and so make this verse read: *“His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor . . .”* And I think the reason why they do that is because in English, the word wonderful is usually an adjective – it usually modifies another noun, and tells us *what* is wonderful. It is a wonderful *day*. We had a wonderful *time*. You are a wonderful *person*. . . . But Isaiah is doing something different here, and is saying something very significant by giving this child born to us the name Wonderful. For with this name, He is *not* just saying that this child will do wonderful things; He is *not* just saying that this child's counsel will be wonderful. He is saying that this child *is* the Wonderful One. That this child, this son given to us, is God Himself.

For in the Old Testament, this word *wonderful* is used predominantly to describe the work of God – the One *from whom* all wonders come. And it is used especially to describe the miracles God performed in leading His people out of Egypt in the Exodus: the dividing of the sea, the safe crossing of the sea, the leading by pillar of cloud and fire, the cleaving of the rocks in the deserts and the providing of water. And so Isaiah, by putting *this* name, such a significant name, first in his list of names, wants you to know and make the

connection right from the start that the God who created the world, the God who rescued His people from Egypt, the God who raised up His people Israel and gave them their own land, the God who sent His prophets and spoke by them – this God, this very self-same God, is the One now born into our world as a tiny, helpless baby. And if you could read Hebrew, seeing *that* word in *this* verse would make you stop in your tracks! To make such a powerful assertion – that God is this child and this child is God. The Wonderful One Himself. The Wonderful One in *our* flesh and blood.

Now some are scandalized by that truth, thinking that God would never do such a thing; that it is beneath Him; that God does not come down and become human, but that we humans must become god-like and climb up to Him! **But is that not the Wonder?** That the Wonderful One does this Wonderful thing, and joins Himself to us. And not just for a time, but for eternity! Which led Luther to write: *“What is more wonderful than that God and man are one person? That there is one Son both of God and Mary? Who will ever comprehend this mystery, even in eternity? That God is a man, that the Creature is the Creator and the Creator is the Creature? This mystery is forever wonderful, even after this life. The very angels desire to look into it (1 Pt 1:12) and yet with all their gazing they will never be finished. We are blessed in believing these incomprehensible things, but more blessed, indeed shall be most blessed when we shall see them with our own eyes, when faith shall have been taken out of the way, when we shall ‘see Him as He is’ (1 Jn 3:2) . . .”*

And we know that this is true, that we *shall* see Him as He is, for the Wonderful One has not only done this Wonderful thing, but has done what is most Wonderful – He laid down His life for us. For that was the reason for His **Wonderful birth** at Christmas – His **Wonderful death** on the cross, followed by His **Wonderful resurrection** from the dead. And by doing those Wonderful things, to lead His people on a new exodus, to the Promised Land of Heaven. Leading us safely through the sea of Holy Baptism, and with those same waters flooding and drowning our enemies. Leading us safely through the wilderness of this life with the pillar of His Word, and feeding us with the Bread from Heaven, until we cross the Jordan, to live at peace and rest with Him forever.

The people in Jesus’ day saw Jesus doing this Wonderful work, as we heard in the reading from Matthew. And upon seeing such Wonderful things, they knew: this was the promised Son of David. This was the One of whom Isaiah spoke. And the same is true for us today. This Wonderful One is still doing Wonderful things among us and in us. He is born in our hearts and gives us faith. He heals the sin-sick soul with the forgiveness of sins. He raises us who were dead in our sins to a new life in Him. And He is leading us Home. Is this not a Wonder? That God would do such things for us? For us sinners; for us who doubt; for us who do not deserve such Wonderful things?

But that is what makes this *the most wonderful time of the year*, isn’t it? And it is! For unto

you is born this day in the City of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. **And His name is Wonderful.**

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.