

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash
December 6, 2009**

'Names of the Messiah' – Advent 2

Isaiah 9:6

His Name Shall Be Called... Counselor!

1. *His credentials*
2. *His diagnosis*
3. *His prescription*

**Hymns: "Lead Us to Your Light" – 735 –
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All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Isaiah 9:6 –

To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called... Counselor.

Stewart had felt depressed for quite a while. He had not felt like doing much in public. He stayed at home more than he ever had. He didn't even feel like getting out of bed some days he was so depressed. His best friend noticed these changes in him and was concerned. He came to visit a few times and finally got up the nerve to tell Stewart what he thought. He told him, "Stewart, I think you need some counseling." "No, I don't!" Stewart responded. "I don't need any psychiatrist probing my thoughts!"

George had always enjoyed a drink or two, but things had changed. Now it seemed he couldn't drink at all unless he had a lot of drinks. He drank more frequently and couldn't help looking ahead all day long to when he would be able to go home and have a few drinks. His wife noticed this change in him. One day she said, "George, honey, I think you need to get some counseling." "I do not!" he exclaimed. "No one needs to tell me how to run my life!"

Those are pretty common responses to suggestions that a person needs counseling, aren't

they? Most people today don't like the suggestion that they may need counseling! How about you? Do you need a counselor? Your first thought might also be "No!" But don't answer too fast. In the Advent sermon series we're following on "*Names of the Messiah*," Scripture tells us that the coming Savior is "Counselor."

As we ponder this thought today from Isaiah 9:6, we will see:

1. **His credentials**
2. **His diagnosis**
3. **His prescription**

1 – Is it important to look at the credentials of a counselor? We certainly do put a lot of stock in it with taking guidance from others. Have you ever had questionable guidance given to you from someone who didn't have any idea what you were going through:

- The person who has not been blessed yet with children counseling you on parenting
- The single person who offered strong opinions to you with their marital guidance.
- The person who doesn't understand depression who tells a depressed person to "just straighten up."
- The person who hasn't experienced loss telling a grieving person to "just get over it."

It's frustrating to be on the receiving end of counsel like that from friends because we don't believe the person is qualified or understands. If we go to an earthly counselor, we might be interested in where his diploma is from and what degrees he has.

In the same way, we want accurate counsel from Jesus our Great Counselor. Might we be tempted to wonder if he can relate to us? He never sinned. He was never married. He never fathered children. What are his credentials?

The fact is, we won't find a more qualified Counselor than the One promised in Isaiah 9! We could list a few "degrees" he has that aren't even in the books! What initials could Jesus put on his shingle as our Counselor?

1. **A.S.W. – Our Counselor is “Absolute Superior Wisdom.”** Not only does he have the Word of God with which he can counsel us; one of his titles is the Word. John 1 tells us, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* We also hear in Romans 11, *“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”*

This showed itself pretty clearly in Jesus' life. Remember the only account we have of his childhood? It occurred when he was 12 years old. His parents lost track of him and found him in the Temple courts talking with the teachers of the law. What was the result of the conversations he was having that day? *“Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”* (Luke 2:47)

Remember the impact his teaching had on the crowds later in his life? The longest sermon of Jesus that we have recorded for us is the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. At the end of that sermon, Matthew writes, *“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”*

The fact is, this individual is the authority on the Scriptures and the plan of God! He has no need for advisors or for a cabinet. Our world's kings and presidents do, but not the Messiah.

2. **U.P.P. – Our Counselor specializes in “Understanding his People Perfectly.”** Hebrews 2 tells us, *“He had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”* Does Jesus understand how we feel? Can he say that he has walked in our shoes? Most certainly! He was made like us “in every way.” He knew what it was like to feel weak, to experience a loss, and to face temptation.

We also read in Isaiah 53, *“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”* Should we wonder whether Jesus knew what it was like to feel pain? To be rejected? To face situations of despair? No, Jesus understands perfectly what we face.

3. **B.H. – Our Counselor also carries a degree in “Brutal Honesty.”** He will tell you exactly what your problem is and what needs to be done about it. This may seem cruel, but it's not. Imagine a doctor that must consult with an emphysema patient. Honesty is crucial to that conversation. *“You must stop smoking and being in places where you contact smoke.”* Is that cruel, or a reason to be grateful? In the same way, our Savior only tells us what he does so that we can benefit!
4. **C.F.P. – Our Counselor also has the important quality of “Caring For his People.”** 1 Peter 5 says, *“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”* Jeremiah 31 also tells us, *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”*

Remember how Jesus felt as he approached Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? Luke 19 says, "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes." Jesus felt deep sorrow for his capital city! And remember the rich young (and misguided) man who came to Jesus one day and felt he had been perfect enough to merit God's favor? Mark 10 tells us that Jesus looked at him and loved him."

Who would want to have a counselor that cared nothing for him? What a comforting thought that our Messiah truly loves us and invites us to call him anytime!

2 – Those are the Great Counselor's credentials; now, what is his diagnosis? After all, as we said, we want more than simply a sympathetic Counselor. We want an honest one.

When Jesus counseled the woman caught in adultery that was brought to him. He told her, "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:11) Jesus met a woman at a well in Samaria and he told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband." (John 4:16-18) Those words hurt. Or consider what Jesus said to the religious leaders of the people who rejected him: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning," (John 8:44) "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?" (Matthew 23:33)

It hurts us also when the Scriptures tell us, "No one living is righteous before you." (Psalm 143:2) Romans 3 has more news for us: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become

worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Ouch!

Can you imagine a trip to the doctor to discuss the results of your medical tests, and he tells you, "You're going to die. There's nothing we can do." How shocking! What does our Great Counselor tell us? We're in a terminal condition. **It's the dreaded news that we cannot even hope for heaven by our own works, and are headed for hell.** But that is the first step toward realizing better news. What is the Great Counselor's prescription?

3 – The prescription is one word, a five-letter word spelled G-R-A-C-E. To those diagnosed with eternal death, our Counselor tells us that he is the true Way. To the repentant sinner, he says, "It is finished!" To those steeped in grief yet faith he says, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." For the burning conscience the Counselor has the words, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Because of the price he paid on the cross, the full price for our sins, we can be assured of forgiveness and heaven through faith in him.

Have you heard of a case of a dreaded diagnosis of a terminal condition that has somehow changed to a miracle cure? In an unexplainable way, a person has been inexplicably healed? This is our story. Miraculously, the Messiah has given his life for our sins and we have eternal life.

The Great Counselor has additional counsel for his people. He also counsels us with guidelines for a blessed Christian life. We don't have the time to list all of these! Here are a few:

- *“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)*
- *“Flee the evil desires of youth.” (2 Timothy 2:22)*
- *“It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.” (Psalm 118:8)*
- Forgive your brother *“not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” (Matthew 18:22)*
- *“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ ” (Hebrews 13:4-5)*
- *“Be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” (Luke 12:40)*
- *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (Ephesians 5:25)*
- *“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:22)*

And many more!

This is vitally important for us for two reasons. First, the “counselors” of this world compete with the Great Counselor. Many in our world claim to be authorities in giving guidance. For example, many consider Oprah Winfrey to be a wise counselor in this world. In a quote intended to inspire others to success, she said, “The ability to triumph begins with you. ALWAYS.” That’s a motivating statement! But an absolutely false one. We are only on our way to a “successful” life when we realize our sinfulness and need for a Savior.

Or Dr. Phil. He’s considered to be a counseling guru in our world. I recently saw an

answer he gave to a parent struggling to know what to do about her daughter: “My 22-year old daughter is in a relationship with a woman... Could this be a form of rebellion? Can homosexuality be learned and unlearned?” Dr. Phil’s answer included: “You are wired that way... The important thing is that you just love her through that. What difference does it make? Accept her, support her and do not be judgmental. It is difficult enough for her to live openly and honestly in this society; don’t put your judgment on top of that.” What misguided counsel!

No one else counsels with the truth like our Great Counselor. Therefore, the second reason this is vitally important to recognize today is so we are reminded of the importance of being in God’s house weekly. Here we learn from his Word. We receive his Supper. We worship as a body and build each other up. In every way that we have contact with the Word, we hear the voice of our Great Counselor speaking as he strengthens our faith. This is also why we become greatly concerned when loved ones are not coming to God’s house to hear the voice of their Great Counselor each week.

Finally, a fitting question to finish with today is: Will you listen? It’s interesting that many people go to a counselor but will pick and choose what guidance to follow and which to ignore. Proverbs 19 tells us, *“Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.”*

May we rejoice that we have a Great Counselor as Isaiah foretold!

- 1. He has the perfect credentials**
- 2. He diagnoses us honestly**
- 3. He prescribes an eternal cure**

May our Counselor guide us through this life by his Word till we see him face to face in heaven! Amen.