

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash
December 13, 2009**

'Names of the Messiah' – Advent 3

Isaiah 9:6

His Name Shall Be Called... Mighty God!

- 1. Is he really true God?*
- 2. Does it matter if he's true God or not?*

**Hymns: "Lead Us to Your Light" – 2 –
240 – Closing: 6**

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... Mighty God.*

Have you ever read "The Prince and the Pauper?" This classic book, written by Mark Twain, has an interesting storyline. Young Prince Edward of England comes across a young boy in a beggarly family who resembles him quite remarkably. The two boys get to know one another and it's suggested that they switch clothes and that the prince live in the beggarly family for a time. Why do that? He is interested in finding out the conditions in which a commoner family lives.

Soon the prince is forced to cope with the rigors of poverty. He becomes aware of the stark inequalities of classes of people. He realizes the harsh nature of the court system, seeing the accused convicted on the flimsiest of evidence. He vows to reign with mercy when he regains his rightful place and when he becomes king. Eventually he does switch back with the other boy and becomes the king of England.

We see some similarities between that novel and the lesson we have in our Scripture reading today. We continue to look at "*Names of the Messiah*" from Isaiah 9:6. This morning we focus on the phrase, "**He Shall Be Called... Mighty God.**" We see how the "Prince" of heaven came to be a pauper for you and me. **As we study this, let's ask:**

- 1. Is he really the Mighty God?**
- 2. Does it matter if he is the Mighty God?**

Do we really need to consider part 1, if the Messiah really is the "Mighty God?" After all, you may be saying to yourself:

- "Pastor, I learned that Jesus is really God back in Catechism class!"
- "Pastor, I simply know in my heart that this must be true."

I'm glad if you have a conviction that Jesus is truly God, yet I'd submit that we need to spend a few minutes on this today for some important reasons.

Many people have struggled with whether Jesus was true and almighty God from eternity. Some try to answer the question by saying Jesus is the "Son of God," a name used 43 times for him in the New Testament, but that he is not equal to God the Father. What Bible verse would you point a person to that would prove otherwise?

In the New Testament, he was not accepted by the religious leaders as either God or as God's ambassador. When he did speak clearly about his identity, they picked up stones to stone him!

In the early Christian Church, many struggled with the identity of Jesus. After all, which is easier to believe about Jesus, that he is man or that he is God? For most, they had heard the stories of how he walked the earth as a man. The difficult teaching to believe was that true, almighty God could be contained in a human body.

In the discussions in the church after the time of the apostles, it was debated whether Christ was created by the Father right before the creation of the rest of the world, similar to God but not of the same essence (Arius), or whether he was of the same essence and divinity of God (Alexander and Athanasius). The entire 4th Century this battle when on!

Questions arose such as:

- Is Jesus younger (and therefore inferior) to the Father?
- Is Jesus inferior to the Father because he has a human nature?
- Is Jesus inferior to the Father because he chooses not to know the time of the Last Day?

Heresies about Jesus' nature developed:

- **Monarchians, Patripassinists, and Modalists** maintained that God the Father became Christ.
- **Arianists** believed that the Father created the Son.
- **Polytheism** makes the Son a different God than the Father.
- **Nestorianism** taught that God dwelled in the man Christ, but that there was not a uniting of the two natures.
- **Docetism** teaches that the Son as God used a body as a "tent" to walk the earth, but didn't truly become human!

It's interesting that many of these heretical thoughts are still circulated in our times.

In fact, the primary theology textbook of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) takes it a step further in addressing the teaching about Christ truly being God: **"Biblical writings are products of two thousand years of history and must be examined as are all other literary remains from antiquity. The startling discovery was that the (church's doctrines) are not**

to found in the Bible, but are products of a later time. In the age of Christendom, the (doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ, as formulated in the Nicene and Athanasian creeds, were necessary to believe for salvation... These (doctrines) cannot be required for faith, since they lack solid biblical support... Myth and its symbols are indispensable to express the reality of God in the person of Jesus." ("Christian Dogmatics" by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson. 2 vols, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987)

Please realize I'm not trying to talk you into a heresy today! My point is simply that it's good to know what the Bible says and what we believe.

Let's focus in on our name for the Messiah today: Mighty God. The word for "God" used here is **EL**. EL is a common and generic name for "God." The predominant use of this word is for the true God himself, a fact that is very important in this discussion. In and of itself, the use of this word won't settle an argument, because the word can be used for a small "g" pagan god, or in rare use can refer to a mighty man or angel.

The word EL is paired with another Hebrew word, **GIBBOR**. The word GIBBOR means "warrior, soldier, valiant fighter." It does not stress God-ness as much as it stresses the tenacity and powerful, warlike ability of an individual. The word would be used for your favorite movie character who can take on 25 men attacking him and fight them all off in an impressive martial arts display.

We could bring in another Hebrew term for the Messiah, a more familiar one to you: **EMMANU-EL**. EMMANU means "with us" and you see our Hebrew word EL attached at the end. "God is with us" is what this individual is called. This will solidify our faith in who the Messiah is. We wouldn't say "The pagan god is with us," or have any reason to lean toward a rare translation such as "A great man or angel is with us." The emphasis is on the predominant usage that "God is with us!"

Can it really be so? The one who experienced childbirth? The one who had diapers to change? The one who would get hungry? And so tired that he fell asleep in the small boat with his disciples in a raging storm?

If there's any doubt remaining, a look at other passages from Scripture finalize the correct teaching about Jesus' divinity:

- *John 1 - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory...*
- *Rom 9 - From (the patriarchs) is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!*
- *1 John 5 - We are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*
- *Colossians 2 - For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.*
- *John 17 – “Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”*
- *John 8:58 - "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"*

The point is clearly reinforced by the characteristics displayed by Jesus in knowing all things, even being able to know the thoughts of his detractors; in his changeless nature (*“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” – Hebrews 13*); and in his mighty acts, miracles that only God could do in stilling a storm and raising the dead. **Yes, Jesus truly is the Mighty God!**

Yet one question remains. Does it matter? All this debate! All this talk! Is this merely a lot of time and paper being spent on something that doesn't really matter in the big picture?

Certainly not! In fact, we would go as far as saying that if Jesus is not truly God, he could not be our Savior. Our salvation hinges on this important fact. We see this clearly when we read Scripture concerning what kind of Savior we need to have.

The Savior we need had to accomplish two things to win our salvation. To illustrate this, imagine that your mom wants to have a certain kind of Christmas cookie this year, let's say the kind that have the Hershey's chocolate kiss pressed on the top. And let's say that you're nine years old and want to give it a try on your own. You tell her, "I can make those cookies, Mom!" She's not so sure. But after thinking it over, she decides to let you have a try. She clears out of the kitchen and you're left to carry out your job.

As you work, problems arise. When you mix up the dough, you accidentally put in two cups of salt instead of sugar. But after tasting it, you conclude that the baking process will take care of that problem. Unknowingly, you also have used baking soda instead of baking powder. But you get the first pan in the oven and head for the living room to wait till they're done. Your mom is watching something on TV that engrosses you, so you remember that there are cookies in the oven five minutes after you were supposed to have removed them. You run into the kitchen and see smoke coming out the oven door. You grab a small hotpad, open the door, and snatch at the hot pan. But you burn yourself in the process and scatter burned cookies on the floor! Your mom comes in and says that's it, you had your chance and you blew it. You're done.

What will your mom need to do in order to have the Hershey kiss cookies this year? She will need to do two things. First, she'll need to make them right.

We messed up our chance to live life right:

- You sassed off to your parents
- You disobeyed them
- You stole that item, small or big, in your past
- You said that very hurtful comment to your classmate or your spouse
- You lusted
- You have made other gods in your heart
- You cursed out that driver

You made a mess of life. If God requires a perfect life lived to enter heaven, we're in trouble!

Can we rely on a man to live a perfect life for us? How about someone with a squeaky clean reputation? A real Tiger Woods type? We won't find this individual in a mere human. But what do the Scriptures say about Christ? *"We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin."* (Hebrews 4) And Romans 5 tells us the implications of this: *"Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."*

However, your mom isn't finished with her task yet in fixing the cookie situation. She also needs to clean up your mess. It's all over the kitchen. Who will clean this mess up? **We need someone strong enough to "crush the serpent's head," as Genesis foretold.**

Who can do it? Psalm 49 says, *"No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him – the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough."* No human could pay the price of our sins. Only a mighty warrior who is God himself has a costly enough life to pay this price! Thank God we hear in Galatians 3, *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'"* Thank the Lord that we read in 1 Peter 1, *"For you know that it was not with perishable*

things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." By his sacrifice on the cross, our sins are completely paid for.

Thank God that he sent his Son, the Mighty God, who alone could do these two vital tasks to win our salvation!

Finally, we see that the Messiah's story is a bit different than the story of "The Prince and the Pauper." In that novel we see a kind-hearted young boy who wanted to see what life was like on the other side and do what he could to make it better. But he could never completely change or fix the bad situations of their day. In the story of our Prince, Mighty God, we see One who has completely changed our situation and gives us the hope of heaven.

May we thank God every day that he has taken pity on our sad situation and has provided the Mighty God to redeem us! Amen.