



Mighty God - Isaiah 9:6

Advent Week 2- Joy

Recorded 11/30/20, Scheduled to Preach Live 12/6/20?

We are going to Isaiah 9 today.

When Jesus came at Christmas - it was received as good news of great joy.

In response to this news, even this year, we are to be people of joy. And if we don't hear the message of Christmas as the greatest news we've ever heard, enough to give us joy even in 2020, then we have not understood the message. And if we don't think this is a huge deal, we are missing it.

The fact that God took on human flesh to dwell among us, or the incarnation of the Son of God is the biggest deal there is.

Theologian Herman Bavinck said "the incarnation is the central fact in the entire history of the world" (274).

The birth of Christ was going to be so pivotal that the Divine birth announcement was sent through the prophet Isaiah 700 years before His birth. If you think your birth announcements are clever, God one-upped you by sending His 7 centuries before the baby was born.

Isaiah 9:6:⁶ **"For to us a child is born,
to us 'a son is given;
'and the government shall be 'upon⁴ his shoulder,
and his name shall be called⁵**

**Wonderful ^yCounselor, ^zMighty God,
^aEverlasting ^bFather, Prince of ^cPeace.**

We looked at Jesus as the wonderful counselor last week. The second name given to Jesus in this announcement is Mighty God. *El Gibbor*.

This means that Jesus's birth was not just the birth of a great human leader. It wasn't just the birth of a wise teacher or an enlightened individual. It was the birth of Mighty God. Isaiah calls Him Immanuel, which means God with us.

It's important to realize that this is the announcement of the Deity of Jesus, not just the Divinity of Jesus. Some use those two terms interchangeably, but they're a little different. Divinity is possessing the attributes of God, which Jesus certainly did. So it is true that Jesus is Divine, but He is more than that.

Deity is a state of being - to be Deity is to be God. To be divine is to possess some of the attributes of God.

And I'm nerding in on this because to have a false Jesus is to have a false hope of salvation. To worship something else named Jesus is to have a different God and a different eternity. Who this Jesus is matters. You can't get Jesus wrong and still be a Christian.

There was a time years ago that my wife and I were at a party, and I came up behind her standing at a table, at least the back of her head looked like Debbie, and I was inches away from putting my arm around her when I realized that wasn't her and was able to put the brakes on just in time. Obviously, having a wrong idea of who my wife is would have had some terrible consequences.

And we run the risk of putting our arm around the wrong Jesus if we haven't had a good look at him. We can embrace a Jesus that looked like him in a lot of ways, that had the same name, but it turns out that wasn't Him.

Some say that Jesus was a great man, who grew in knowledge and godliness and attained divinity. That Jesus is what a human being can be if that person doesn't sin, applies himself to godliness, follows God without holding back. I've heard popular teachers say that Jesus shows us human potential - if you really strive for perfection, Christ is what you'll become.

One popular non-Christian teacher, says “Christ by definition is the best a man can be.” He’s the best of the best, and something we can all strive for.

And there is a lot of truth in those sentiments: Christ is our example, Christ is a perfect human being, Christ does show us what the perfect man is. Christ is Divine - but that’s not saying enough about Him. He isn’t just a perfectly enlightened, perfectly wise, perfectly behaving person come to set an example. He is those things, but far far far far more than those things.

The news is better than that! When we look at Jesus, we aren’t just looking at a great guy. The words of the song are true:

“Veiled in flesh the godhead see, hail th’incarnate deity.”

Isaiah says His name shall be called El Gibbor, Mighty God.

Some have said that this idea that Jesus is deity was a pretty late invention of the church. That there was a man named Jesus who taught great things, drew a following, but in the centuries after his death, his followers over-glorified Him and started ascribing to Him deity. He was a great guy, but later on He was mistakenly worshipped as God. People just went overboard a few centuries after His death.

But in this prophesy, written 700 years before His birth, He was already called Mighty God. The baby who was to be born would be God with us, would be mighty God.

Not only divinity - not only one with the father in the moral sense, not only god-indwelt, not only enlightened. But God with us. Mighty God. El Gibbor.

That was no late creation of the church.

And also, remember, that in the scriptures we have the writings of the people who hung out with Jesus.

John, who hung out with Jesus, wrote,

**“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
John 1:1**

Paul, who saw Christ and knew His his first apostles said:

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:16-17)

And again Paul in Titus 2:13:

“waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,”

Matthew, the thieving tax collector turned follower of Jesus, tells us that Jesus said

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” Matthew 18:20.

This was the testimony of the apostles, the people who saw him and knew him and walked with him - they taught that He was God.

And if anyone wouldn't be prone to teach that about someone, it would be those that are closest to him.

I know some at times will put a pastor on a pedestal and treat them like they must be somehow other or above everyone else. And the cure for that is to just hang out with me. Come over to the house, sit for a coffee. All of the temptation to worship a person goes away when you get close to them.

But the people who were closest to Jesus, including some of his brothers who spent a lifetime with him and the apostles who spent 3 years with Him came away from that saying things like this that Peter, the closest of the followers of Jesus, wrote:

“Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1).

To get closer to any normal person is to become less impressed with them. Those who were closest to Jesus worshipped Him. And they wrote about that in the first century, not the third. The whole Jesus is deity thing didn't come later. It has always been true from eternity past, and the coming of God among us was announced 700 years before He got here.

Before the year 80, this was the testimony of the Christians, in writing. We have their songs that they sang about it. We see their lives transformed far more than they'd be transformed by a teacher who died.

Jesus is indeed a man - He was a child, a son, given in the manger. And He is God with us.

There are Three Important Errors to Avoid, so we don't put our arm around the wrong Jesus:

1) One Error is to Believe Jesus wasn't Truly God.

Some, as we've said believe that Jesus was just a man, a superior one and really good one, maybe even the ultimate one, but somehow less than God. Or perhaps that he learned and grew so much that he attained deity - he went farther in righteousness and learning than any of us could and graduated to being God.

The problem is that doesn't make sense of passages like the ones we just read.

2) Another Error is to Believe Jesus Wasn't Truly Man

Some, in response to verses like that, have said that Jesus is God who for a time pretended to be a man. He pretended to learn and grow as a PR move. Kind of like a president going to hammer a few nails into a house they're rebuilding after a hurricane, for the cameras to see, and to show some solidarity. Jesus pretended to learn and grow to say, "I'm not really one of you, but I'm with you."

There used to be a doctrine called Docetism, from the Latin word "docetae" which means "to seem." It said that Jesus only seemed human, and everything that seemed

human about Jesus was an illusion. The greeks typically thought the material world was evil, and God could never therefore become man, so Jesus wasn't actually human. He just seemed human, but ultimately was just a phantom, (or maybe like those holograms on Star Trek.)¹ Some greeks thought that if he was God, He was God "trapped in evil matter," but not really truly human.²

The problem with all of that is the Bible:

1 John 4:2-3 "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already."

So the closest followers of Jesus said that to deny that Jesus came in the flesh was to deny Him altogether and to be against Him - anti-Christ.

3) Another Error Is to Believe Jesus Was a Cross Between God and Man - a Mixture

Some others have said that Jesus was a mixture of God and man. He had God as His Father and Mary as His mother, so he was basically a cross between the two. He had some of the attributes of his human mom (like needing to learn, getting tired, getting hungry, needing sleep,) but also some attributes of God the Father, like miracle-working power.

But the problem with that is that if you mix his nature with another nature, you have a third thing altogether. If you mix God's nature with anything else, you have cut it, you have diluted it. And you no longer have God, you have something less than God. And scripture affirms that Jesus is not less than God.

If you mix human nature with divine nature, you have someone that isn't human, you lose His humanity. And scripture affirms He was very much a man.

So Christians took centuries wrestling with these things that were taught from the beginning. They knew they were true but hadn't formulated how to put them together. So

¹ More on Docetism can be found here: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Docetism>

² Horton, Michael. *The Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). 469.

finally, in 451 AD, they called a council, where they got together church leaders and scholars from around the world to suss this out and make a statement about Who all Christians believe Jesus to be. This council, the Council of Chalcedon³, issued the Chalcedonian Creed⁴, which said, among other things, that:

- 1) Jesus was truly God and truly man.
- 2) Jesus was human in all ways that we are, but was without sin.
- 3) Jesus possessed 2 natures - He was God and man. And those two natures existed in Jesus without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.
- 4) The distinction of each of his natures was preserved but occurred in one Person, Jesus.

This means Jesus is not God who looked like a man, He is really a man.

Jesus is not just a great man who became divine. He is deity.

Jesus is not a mix of God and man or a cross between God and man, He is truly man and truly God.

Jesus was not a superman because He is God, and He was not a lower form of God because He was a man.

He was always God and never ceased to be or became less than God.

³ Read more about the Council of Chalcedon here:

<https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/council-of-chalcedon>

⁴ The Chalcedonian Creed, or Chalcedonian Definition: *"Following, then, the holy Fathers, we all unanimously teach that our Lord Jesus Christ is to us One and the same Son, the Self-same Perfect in Godhead, the Self-same Perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly Man; the Self-same of a rational soul and body; co-essential with the Father according to the Godhead, the Self-same co-essential with us according to the Manhood; like us in all things, sin apart; before the ages begotten of the Father as to the Godhead, but in the last days, the Self-same, for us and for our salvation (born) of Mary the Virgin Theotokos as to the Manhood; One and the Same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten; acknowledged in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the difference of the Natures being in no way removed because of the Union, but rather the properties of each Nature being preserved, and (both) concurring into One Person and One Hypostasis; not as though He were parted or divided into Two Persons, but One and the Self-same Son and Only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as from the beginning the prophets have taught concerning Him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself hath taught us, and as the Symbol of the Fathers hath handed down to us."*

He was truly human, but didn't didn't have sin in His genes like we did. The human nature of Jesus was just like Adam's nature was before the fall in the garden. It was un sinful human nature.⁵

Now I know this has been a little nerdy. And it's important to know.

But remember that when this was announced in the New Testament, angels rejoiced. If this isn't some of the greatest news we have ever heard and the ground for huge joy, if this doesn't affect our lives, then we don't get it at all.

When the angels saw the birth of Christ, they didn't just put facts about it in their spreadsheets, they announced it as news of great joy.

Now, because "the incarnation is the central fact in the entire history of the world," we could unpack forever all of the implications of that and why this is news of great joy for us.

So let's just look at two - a vertical one and a horizontal one.

The biggie: The deity of Jesus makes salvation possible.

Another thing that Isaiah would announce about Jesus is:

Isaiah 53:4-5 "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."

Before the time of Christ, people didn't know how Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 9 could be talking about the same person. How could Mighty God also be a suffering servant? Those two ideas didn't seem to fit.

But unless those two ideas came together, there would be no salvation.

Because how could we be healed by the chastisement of another person who is sinful like us?

⁵ Horton, Michael. *The Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). 469.

If God is chastising people, or disciplining people, we all have it coming. If God punishes me I am getting what I deserve. I can't look at you and say, "That counts for you too." We all have our sins and we all deserve punishment for them. You for yours and me for mine. And since the debt I've incurred is infinite, there's no way my punishment could count for you. There won't be any leftover.

If Jesus was just another person with sins and failures like me, then he could only be punished for his own sins and failures. But by His stripes we are healed.

This doesn't happen if He is just a human martyr. A human martyr might inspire us to do great things, to take risks, to give our lives for a cause. The William Wallace's of history certainly have inspired movements and followers.

But the death of a merely human martyr can't heal us, because even the best of people who have given their lives for a cause have their own sins and issues.

But by His stripes we are healed.

So for his death to be able to heal us, for it to be able to pay the infinite sin debt that all who would ever believe in Him would incur, He had to be God. He had to be infinite.

It doesn't say that by his death we are inspired, or motivated, or encouraged. (Those things are all true.) But his chastisement brought us peace.

His wounds were human wounds, but more powerful than merely human wounds. His suffering was real, but it was redemptive unlike any other human suffering.

And that was only possible because He is El Gibbor.

This also says something about what our greatest need is.

Imagine you are in Judah in 700 BC - remember the original circumstances, their enemies were surrounding them. They were confused about allegiances with other nations. They had a wicked king, their nation was wicked, but the big problem was that army out there that wanted to wipe them out.

And then imagine they understand the final meaning of the prophesy. And God says, "Good news, a baby will be born 700 years from now."

That doesn't sound like good news because it doesn't meet their immediate needs. That's like the old Geico commercials where someone would deliver terrible news and then say, "But I do have good news...I just saved a bunch of money on car insurance by switching to Geico." It wasn't relevant good news.

And a baby being born in 700 years isn't good news, they would probably think. It didn't meet the immediate need.

We know our big issue, we think, today is COVID - we are praying and longing for answers to that. We want the virus to be gone, the restrictions to be gone, the masks to be gone, the sickness and death and fear from all of this to be gone. So someone telling us about God's plan for humanity might not seem like great news - we have real issues.

But the fact that God announces the coming of His son in light of the issues facing them was God's way of saying that their biggest issue isn't what they think it is. And our biggest issue isn't what we think it is.

We may think the biggest need of our world is a cure for COVID and an end to all of this - and we are certainly praying for that. But our biggest need is to have our iniquity carried and our wounds cured by a baby who came 2000 years ago.

And if this doesn't seem like joy-inducing good news, it can only be because we don't grasp our biggest need.

Our biggest need is to know God, our biggest need is to have our evil dealt with.

And, in the long run, the reason for all this sin and injustice and evil out there is a fundamental disconnect between man and God. All that is wrong with the government, with our bodies, with our families, with our lives has somebody's sin to blame somewhere. Which doesn't mean all of our problems are because of our personal sin - it's not true that I'm always suffering because of something I directly did - but at the very least we can trace all of the problems in the world back to Adam's sin.

And God coming to live and die among us is the answer for that - for the root issue, for the core sin, for the misery beneath the misery, for the pain beneath the pain. He has come to release us from our sins and fears by His healing death on the cross.

In Isaiah's day, the reason Judah was a mess and war drums were beating and kings were refusing to listen to God was because of sin. And good news: a baby is coming.

So the coming of God with us is great news that gives great joy, because only God among us can heal us and save us and meet our deepest true need. Only God could save, and God took on flesh and became a man. El Gibbor was among us.

I'd like to invite you to receive that salvation.

Maybe you're watching this video because it's Christmas time, maybe feeling your own lack, or need, or guilt, or fear.

And that may not be misplaced. We are guilty people. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

But don't believe that you can be rescued just by the teaching of Jesus. He's a wonderful counselor so there is no teaching like his, no guidance like his, no law like his - live your life by it. But in attempting to do so, you'll see that you still fall short. His law alone isn't the answer.

The answer is that He actually pays for the sins and failures of all who turn and trust in Him. His death was an atoning death, He took our place. The hell that we deserve for eternity was paid for in his suffering on calvary. If we will turn from sin and unbelief, turn from what was ultimate to us to make Christ ultimate, and trust Him.

So cry out to him today, hang your life on him, believe in what He has done. And you will be saved.

Great joyh.

And then, to increase our joy in Him, think now of His humility. Think of who He is and all that he laid aside to come take on flesh.

Listen to Philippians 2:

Philippians 2:5 "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus," 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the

likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Look at His humility. He is El Gibbor, the mighty God. He never ceased to be God. He was never less than God. He was always true God and true man.

But He laid down his rights.

He was God, but didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped. In other words He had all the power and privilege that God has, but He didn't cling to that. He didn't grab onto that. He laid down his rights in love.

Jesus had a right to not come here. To not live in the middle east before air-conditioning and before much running water. To not feel the pain of the death of a friend. To not be nailed to a cross. He alone wasn't a sinner - He had a right not to die!

He is God among us - and an attribute of God is that He is uniquely totally free. God alone can always do whatever He wants. Nobody can stop Him, none can stay His hand (Daniel says).

We might think we're free, but that's always an illusion. Because even if we make Jeff Bezos money, we will always be limited by time and space, by physical limitations, eventually by sickness and death. If Bezos thinks he has no limitations and can do whatever he wants now, he won't always. He will age, he will get sick, he will die - there are limits to even the most unlimited people.

Jesus, however, because He is Deity, had no limits when He was by His Father's side.

He was totally free, with an infinite set of rights. And He laid them down out of love.

So we could be forgiven. So we could have life.

What kind of love is that? And how much joy should it bring that the infinite, unlimited, El Gibbor loves us like that.

If that isn't the greatest message we've ever heard, if that's not the cause for great joy, we are missing it.

“He took the form of a servant,” - v.7, or a slave. He, though he was God, became a man, like sinful people, though not sinful Himself. He was the highest of all beings, but he poured that glory out and took the lowest of all places.

And HE HUMBLER HIMSELF by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (v.8).

Take that in.

El Gibbor. On a cross.

Mighty God. On a cross.

God with us. Crucified, died, and was buried.

Wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace - laying down all of his rights, giving all of Himself, dying so we could live. He isn't flaunting His rights because He can, He is giving Himself for us.

Think of how much that stands in contrast to the way we so often are. We cling to and flaunt our rights, He laid aside His rights.

We say I have to be the best, I have to be right, I have to win, I have to get the praise, be superior, be strong, never be thought of as weak, I always have to win the argument, I never have the mindset of the lowly, never give up any of my rights, not for a minute.

But the one who rightly had glory laid it aside, came as a man, and took the place of inferiority, the ultimate act of deferring to others, and died, not even a normal death, but the most painful and humiliating of all deaths - the kind reserved for criminals, on a cross.

That was his path to glory.

And Paul says (verse 5) “be like that.” Have that mind.

To believe in that love is to be so softened that we grow into His image.

Be quick to lay down rights. Be willing to lose. Be willing to be thought of as being wrong. Be willing to go to the low places. Be willing to humbly serve.

The fact that Mighty God did that is good news because it saves us, and also good news because it shows us the way.

Sermon Discussion Guide

I. God and Man (Isaiah 9:6)

Jesus is truly God and truly man. What scriptures would you use to defend His Deity? His humanity?

Why is it an error to say that Jesus is half-God and half-man?

Why does this matter?

II. The Humility of God (Philippians 2:5-8)

Philippians describes the way that Jesus is God, but didn't grasp at equality with God.

What rights did Jesus lay down?

Why is that so remarkable?

How does that shape the Christian's life?

How does this shape our behavior toward one another in this COVID season?