

# A Child is Given

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning, everyone. Great to see you. My name is Steve Jeffrey, if you've never met me before. I'm married to Natalie. In a previous church, one of the members of that church that I was part of for 13 years, for 13 years called me Jeff and called Natalie Nicole for 13 years.

About five years ago, and every time, it's Steve. It's Steve. About five years ago, I went back for a funeral to that church. And now in his early 80s, this gentleman walks up to me and says, Steve, so good to see you after all this time. How's Nat? And I'm like, how did he do that?

Like, was he ribbing me the whole time that, you know, now I get it. I've got one of those names where you can, the first name can be the last name and the last name, the first name. And in fact, it's been one of the bangs all of my life. I've been called Jeff for most of my life. It would have just been easy for my parents just to call me Jeff. Just Jeff Jeffrey, just solve everything.

And I'll just always answer yes to that. That'd be great. But there are a lot of rules around how to choose names for children. For instance, you can't choose a name associated with a previous romantic partner of your spouse. Or if a name reminds you of someone you didn't like at school, those names are just off the cards. And you also need to think through how do the first names and the last names roll together? How do they work? You've got to have all that consideration. So, you know, for instance, the most recent addition to our church family, Hazel Mann over there. Fantastic. I mean, that's a great choice. In fact, when we heard that, you know, introduced to Hazel, everyone in our family said, what a great name. Much more appropriate than Anita Mann.

Another one of those not so great combinations is Lois Price. Or a lady that I heard, a lady by the name of Helen, who married a guy named Rodney Back, she became Helen Back. And apparently after 10 years of marriage, it pretty much summed it up, from what I understand. As we think through Christmas today, from the book of Isaiah, we see in the names that have been given to the promised baby, the given baby, we understand who he is, and we understand what he would achieve. So if you've got the St. Paul's app in front of you, you'll see in the outline there that this baby is a surprising gift, a remarkable gift, and a needed gift. So to understand the significance of Christmas, we have to understand that God had been preparing for the very first Christmas centuries before Mary first lay the baby

[ 3 : 1 6 ] Jesus in the feeding trough in Bethlehem. About 700, 800 years before Jesus, we read in Isaiah that God's people were in an awful lot of people were in the world. And the outlook for them was one of deep darkness.

It was very gloomy. It was a time of very significant national crisis. They were economically ruined. They were facing invasion from their enemies. This was a time of deep, deep darkness. The nations to the north were threatening to come in and to annex and to destroy, which is what those nations had done.

Previously, they'd gone in and entirely annihilated. And so that was the threat. And so if you go back a couple of chapters in Isaiah 7, King Ahaz sits on the throne of Judah.

And God says to Ahaz, through the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah, mate, fear not, trust me, keep calm. Don't worry about it. I've got it under control. And so Isaiah prompts King Ahaz to ask God for a sign to confirm for him that God is in fact trustworthy, that he is righteous, that he will bring justice, that he is good.

Ahaz basically replies with the Steve Jeffrey version, thanks but no thanks, I've got it under control. I can handle this problem all by myself. And with that response, God says that I'm going to give you a sign anyway. And it's in chapter 7, verse 14, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and we will call him Emmanuel.

[ 5 : 04 ] Now we read that in Christmas time and it's a time of hope. In Isaiah 7, it wasn't. That promise was a promise of judgment in Isaiah 7. It's a promise that I'm going to start my kingdom all over again through a child born through a virgin. You see, Ahaz in this moment thinks, I can get on without God. I am the Davidic king. I'm descendant of David. I can get on without God.

But God says, in actual fact, Ahaz, I'm going to get on without you. And that's the real crisis. Not the nations to the north. The real crisis for God's people in the beginning of Isaiah is that they're consistent rejection of God.

And this rejection leads them further and further down the road into gloom, defeat and darkness. In fact, in chapter 8, we read that. It just gets darker and darker and darker as judgment descends.

And then you get to chapter 9, verse 1. Here's the promise of hope. Verse 2. Light will dawn in the form of a baby.

And for these people walking in darkness and distress and uncertainty, God told them that what you need more than anything else is a baby.

[ 6 : 47 ] The gift of a baby. And like all great gifts, this gift is a surprise. Ahaz thinks that the light will come for him and for God's people in an alliance with Assyria.

That's where he thinks the light will come. If he joins forces with a strong and powerful nation to defend them, God says, nope.

It's coming in a baby. That's the first surprise. The second surprise is in verse 1 where it says, In the future, he will honour Galilee of the nations by the way of the sea beyond the Jordan.

You see, Isaiah's readers would have thought that, well, if God was going to do something big, something miraculous, he's going to do it from divine headquarters in Jerusalem.

Not so. Salvation is coming out of Galilee of the nations. Galilee had a dubious reputation.

[ 8 : 02 ] Twenty Galilean towns had been given to the king of Tyre by King Solomon. When he received them and went and looked at them, he was so underwhelmed, he nicknamed them the land of Kabul, which means the land good for nothing.

The land good for nothing. Everywhere in the Bible, we see God loves to bring greatness and glory and power and salvation into our lives in ways that we would never, ever expect.

Ahaz didn't expect the baby to be the dawn of hope. And the vast majority of humanity today still don't expect it either.

You see, the reason why Isaiah 7 and Isaiah 9 are read nearly every Christmas is because their fingerprints are all over the biographies of Jesus' life.

Luke 1, we read, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, just in case we weren't sure, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

[ 9 : 25 ] The virgin's name was Mary. Luke tells us Nazareth is in Galilee. He tells us the angel came to a virgin, as Isaiah 7.14 says. We are told that he's about to be married to a descendant of David, as Isaiah 9.7 says.

In chapter 4 of his biography, Matthew quotes from Isaiah 9 to show us that Jesus is clearly the promised dawning of light and hope from Isaiah 9.

The early ministry of Jesus took place in Galilee. That is where the light first dawned for an occupied people. But the real point and surprise is that Jesus is not holding a light.

He is the light. We see this in the names that the baby is given in Isaiah 9. A surprising gift is also a remarkable gift.

This is a remarkable baby. In ancient cultures, a person's name was not arbitrary. It was an identity marker, if you like. Nowadays, we don't give names in our culture as identity markers, per se.

[ 10 : 43 ] Like, you know, Stephen means crown or king. That's not an identity marker in any way. Although I was given the name fox in high school, the nickname fox, because I had red hair.

Now, at best, I could be called mangy fox or silver fox. Not really sure, but I had a big bunch of red hair. That's an identity marker nickname, if you like. Have a look at verse 7.

A child will be born for us. A son will be given to us. And the government, in other words, all rule will be on his shoulders, and he'll be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

The child will be called Wonderful Counselor. You see, Ahaz and God's people got into such a mess because they lacked or they ignored the wise counsel of God.

Isaiah promises that a baby born will be a Wonderful Counselor. Now, that doesn't mean that he's going to be a really good psychologist. It means that the baby will have miraculous or, if you like, supernatural wisdom.

[ 11 : 56 ] A couple of chapters later in Isaiah, we read this idea elaborated on. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him. The spirit of wisdom and understanding. The spirit of counsel and of might.

The spirit of the knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears. But with righteousness, he will judge the needy.

With justice, he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. What that's saying is that Jesus, this baby promised, will have insight, supernatural insight, in the way the world works.

All of his words, all of his decisions, will be just and righteous and true.

Proverbs 4 says that his words are life and health. John tells us that his words bring eternal life and they set us free. But Jesus is not just simply a wise sage or a good teacher.

[ 13 : 03 ] Hebrews 4 tells us that he's able to sympathise us in every way. This is a God who became human. A God who knew temptation, rejections, loneliness, hunger.

He knows what it is to be us. And the Hebrew word that's translated counselor here means the one who advises, instructs, guides through every issue with authority.

Not just a good listener, but someone who guides, instructs with authority. He's the one who has the experience to understand what we're going through.

The wisdom to work out the solution and the power to enact it. You see, Isaiah is referring to a supernatural light dawning in the darkness of our lives.

And so Jesus is saying to you, this Christmas, the path of pain? Yep, I've endured that. Loneliness? I know it.

[ 14 : 08 ] Temptation? Knew that too. Betrayal? Loss? Heartache? I've walked all of those roads for you. And I can reliably show you the way through every one of them.

You see, life's greatest discovery is knowing Jesus. Knowing that he loves you. Knowing that he's promised to always be with you. Knowing he's planned to work out every single thing for the good of those who trust him.

And the reason why Jesus is able to bring such light in the darkness of the world is not simply because he's the ultimate therapist. It's because he is the mighty God.

The claim is that out there, beyond what we can see and measure, is a God. When Isaiah spoke about mighty God, he's not just referring to some random divine being.

He means the God who has been with Israel since they were a teeny weedy little family. Right through to this day with our nation.

[ 15 : 20 ] Way before Isaiah, Israel's leader Moses spoke, asked God what his name was. And God responded simply by saying, I am.

Try that at morning tea. When you use yourself to say, my name's Steve. You know, what's your name? I am. Yeah. What it means here, this is from Exodus 3.

It at least means that God is someone who is all that people need. That there is no lack in him that he cannot overcome because there's no lack in him himself.

He's not defined by anyone else. He just simply and eternally is. And God would remind them of his name over and over and over again throughout the centuries.

Whenever they were in great distress or in fear or in need. In fact, God uses his name to describe himself a total of 6,519 times in the Old Testament.

[ 16 : 29 ] I calculated them by using Google the other day. And when Isaiah says to us, a child is given, he would be called mighty God.

He was saying that one day, one day the great I am would be born as a tiny baby.

That's the promise of light dawning into our dark world. The eternal, all-sufficient I am was going to enter his world as a helpless baby. That is the Bible's astounding claim about the first Christmas.

And to see the truth of it, you need to fast forward 30 years past the first Christmas to see this baby, now a man, doing things that only a powerful deity would do.

In fact, he did do in the Old Testament. Things like calming a storm, walking on water, curing blindness and deafness and paralysis. He raised the dead. He fed multitudes of people with a packed lunch.

[ 17 : 37 ] He rose from the dead. Jesus is the only, only leader of a major world religion who ever claimed to be the divine in our existence.

He was entirely humble in his character and yet entirely self-centred in regard to who he claimed to be.

And we do not come to terms with the meaning of Christmas until we come to terms with who Jesus declares himself to be. The outrageous claim of Christmas is that God is with us.

Jesus, the great I am, is more than raw power. He is personal and present. You see, life looks very different.

If you know in every trial, in every challenge, in every heartache, the great I am is with you. Jesus is also referred to as the eternal father.

[ 18 : 39 ] Father. The word father will produce all kinds of different reactions in us. For some, the word makes us smile because of the joy of being a dad or because the experience of a great dad in our lives.

For some, it's a smile that's tinged with sadness because the great dad is no longer with you. For others, the word brings up all kinds of complicated emotions.

It wants to make you cry, shout. In fact, it's possible that some of the greatest pain in your life is because of your relationship with your father.

But God is different. And that's what we read here. God is different. He's not just an all-powerful authority being.

He is referred to as the eternal father. It's a relational term. God is very different to the never-satisfied dad who rarely, if ever, expresses that they are proud of their children.

[ 19 : 43 ] Zephaniah 3, verse 17. We read about how God treats those he loves. As the eternal father, the Lord will rejoice over you, we glad, as he will be quiet in his love.

He will delight in you with singing. He delights. He's not like the time bomb dad. You know, there's nothing safe at all about the dad who explodes at any given moment.

It's hard to trust someone who at any moment may be in a bad mood or is inconsistent or you are dodging the outbursts. This is how Exodus 34 speaks of God's character.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious. He's a gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love. Jesus is quick to love. He is slow to anger. He's also not the emotionally distant dad.

The mighty God is so emotionally connected to you that he will not rest until you are brought home. You see that in Luke 15, the parable of the prodigal son.

[ 20 : 50 ] The eternal father is not the absent dad. The child with the absent dad harbours deep feelings of personal rejection, that they were not worthy enough for their father's presence.

Hebrews 13, we are told he will never leave us. He would never forsake us. He will never abandon us. Jesus is the only one who doesn't leave, who doesn't disappoint, who doesn't fail, who doesn't hurt, who doesn't die.

He's eternal and he is eternal. And his promise is that he will love you like the perfect father forever.

And that's why he's such a needed gift for us. In the last name given to this baby in Isaiah 9, we see what this baby will achieve.

He will be called Prince of Peace. In Isaiah's time, Ahaz and God's people didn't realise that the rejection of God was in fact their foundational and their biggest issue.

[ 21 : 59 ] They were so fearful of their enemies to the north and yet they failed to see that they were in fact at war with God. The dysfunction we see in all layers of life in this world is the symptom of a much, much bigger issue.

A dysfunctional relationship with a God who has made us all. And we don't enjoy peace in our lives and in our world because we don't enjoy peace with God.

Our greatest relational problem is our lack of relationship with God. Our greatest poverty is the spiritual poverty of not knowing God.

The greatest injustice is in fact the way we have treated our creator. And this has left every single human soul with a deep longing to be settled, to find acceptance, to find peace.

In fact, it's much deeper. We actually live a life pursuing conflict with God. We don't want him to be in charge.

[ 23 : 16 ] We don't want him to be God. We don't want to think that we need him. We want... Or that he... You know, that we should praise him in any way. We go, we've got it.

Got it under control. Don't need your help. The Bible's word for such an attitude is called sin. It's the problem we all have.

We turn away from God to get freedom, approval and acceptance. We make alliances with our careers, with our families, with everything else to give us, to fill us up with what we need more than anything else.

And yet all we get is a feeling of vulnerability, of being exposed, being under judgment, in darkness, always seeking but never getting.

It is not a peaceful life. It is a restless life. And that's why Jesus came. The title Prince of Peace points to dealing with this issue.

[ 24 : 14 ] Into the darkness of a world of rebellion against God, God sent a baby. Born of a virgin. He didn't send an army to destroy our rebellion.

He made an alliance with himself to destroy himself by turning his justice on himself in order that we would be set free and find peace.

Isaiah 53 verse 5 puts it like this. He was pierced. Speaking about the baby, he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities.

Punishment for our peace was on him. And we are healed by his wounds. You see, what Christmas does in every instance consistently points us to Easter and the cost of our peace.

On a cross just outside of Jerusalem, the wonderful counsellor, the mighty God, the eternal father, the prince of peace, absorbed the pain and the penalty for our rebellion against his rule and our rejection of his love.

[ 25 : 29 ] Christmas makes no sense whatsoever without Easter. Jesus being the prince of peace doesn't make sense until we realise that the peace he came to bring was the peace that we most need.

He brings a solution to humanity's deepest problem, not a vaccine for a virus, which you might have hoped for several years ago, but forgiveness for our sin.

The prince of peace brought us peace with God. All the lights that are on display at Christmas time are symbolic of the light that has dawned into the darkness of our sin and our brokenness.

John, in fact, opens his biography of Jesus like this. He was with God in the beginning, speaking about Jesus. Through him, all things were made.

He's God, the mighty God. Without him, nothing has been made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity.

[ 26 : 47 ] In the coming of Jesus, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. And what the beautiful words of Isaiah 9 are is that this baby was a gift.

A son is given. Given. What a gift. A couple of chapters later in John's Gospel, we read the most famous Bible verse of all, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

And at the beginning of John's biography of Jesus' life, we read what Jesus offers us as the prince of peace. To all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be the children of God, to those who believe in his name.

Names matter. Names matter. What we call someone matters. So what do you call God this Christmas?

You see, believing in Jesus' name doesn't mean that you believe he existed. Doesn't mean that you believe that he can help you. Or even that he rose from the dead.

[ 28 : 13 ] It means receiving who he is into your life, according to John 1. It means recognizing that Jesus isn't just a great bloke, and left us with some great thoughts, and some teaching, and some moral things to follow and do.

It means much more than that. It means receiving his name. So what might be your next step this Christmas?

Is, for instance, he your wonderful counselor, in whom you give the right to guide and direct your life through his word? Are you earnestly pursuing knowledge of the scriptures?

Is your next step, is he your mighty God, to whom you entrust and surrender all of your life, the one who has right to rule over you?

Do you worship him as supreme, or are the idols of your life still controlling what is most important? Is he your eternal father, the one whose love awakens you, encourage you, fills you, sustains you?

[ 29 : 27 ] Do you go to him as a fully approved and total dependent child? Is he your prince of peace, in whom you have put your faith as the one who has died in your place, who has turned away God's anger, so that you might be fully forgiven, fully accepted, and fully free forever?

You see, receiving him means receiving his name. All of those things for you.

Receiving him means that whatever you have been searching for all of your life, you find it only in the one who is at the center of Christmas. When we come to him and we receive his name, we receive the approval, the affirmation, the love, we need more than anything else.

A son has been given so that we might be received as children of God. That's the gift he offers you this Christmas.

We're going to play with God. I'm sorry. But I see that when we look at him, it's not aimatum. But the truth is no doubt I do not know. It's not a father. Sometimes it's a quelque animal like a animal of the limo, but even the youth comes in.