The words read as a birth announcement *and* as a royal coronation speech, making bold assertions about the very nature of God. Hearing them again allows us to grab hold of the ancient promises and to carry those promises into our present realities; because this is about more than just a baby in a manger; it is about centuries of expectations fulfilled.

Isaiah provides four titles for the child who is born which help us understand the weight of the good news the angels proclaim. This child is a **Wonderful Counselor.** The Messiah is *Wonderful*! The glory of who He is and what He has done for us should fill us with wonder. You can never really look at Jesus, really know Him, and not be awed that he came for you, to achieve your salvation! Jesus is our *Counselor* in the sense that as God the Son, He takes counsel with the Father and the Holy Spirit for our good. The High Council of the Godhead brought forth our salvation. When we go to Jesus, we gain wisdom and guidance; we receive love, we find sympathy, we get everything that can possibly be wanted in a Counselor. This title reminds us of God’s ongoing engagement with the world in real, tangible ways, reminding us that Jesus is Immanuel, God-with-us.

This child is the **Mighty God**. He is the God of all creation and glory, the LORD who reigns in heaven, the One worthy of our worship and praise. This new king of the world has real power. He is greater than any prince or potentate. To some, this title carries a military significance and may be translated as warrior. This further highlights the surprise of the child in the manger. The One born in humble circumstances will grow up to rule the world with justice and compassion for all people.

The next title, **Everlasting Father**, is a reminder of the eternal nature of God and of the intimacy of the relationship of the savior to us. As such, it offers comfort and stability, a massive antidote to anxiety when things seem to be out of control. He is the calm amid the storm. He who was, and is, will ever be as a parent, our advocate, our defender. John’s Gospel proclaims, “in the beginning was the Word,” reminding us of the enduring presence of God in the past that is now in the present and will continue forevermore.

Finally, the child will be our **Prince of Peace**, the agent of our well-being. The Hebrew word is *shalom*, a word which includes the idea of a world without conflict, but also has the broader meaning of overall well-being, of wholeness, of life going well. This is not a naïve hope or a fantastic wish, some ideal utopia, but a sincere belief that the Savior has power over the world in a way that brings calm to the chaos. This title announces reconciliation between God and humankind, between brothers and sisters, and between humankind and creation. It foreshadows a time when all life moves back into balance. This is the peace which passes all understanding, something that only comes about by the grace of God.

Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace. Imagine all these expectations coming together in one person! This is a vision of epic proportions with implications for a new way of life, a life that is dependable, compassionate, fair, and life-affirming. Yet, this all-expansive, all-encompassing vision ushers in the kingdom of God! The birth of the Christ Child signals a seismic transformation for the world.

That is a lot to put on a birth announcement. That is a lot of pressure to put on the baby in the manger. Of course, that might just be the point of it all. Because while the baby is front and center, this story is about more than just a baby.  It is about the Savior, the light of the world, the One in whom all our hopes and fears reside; the one who comes to us, in the most unlikely of ways, to live among us. This is good news that extends far beyond carols and crèches. Isaiah’s message points us not only to Bethlehem, but to the far greater picture of the fullness of God’s presence in the world.

The birth of Jesus promises us that there is still more to come. God is still with us, still doing astounding things on behalf of the world. The birth of Jesus gets our attention and reminds us that the longing of God’s people to experience God’s presence long ago is our longing, too. The hopes and expectations that God will act in meaningful, transformative ways are our hopes and expectations. Amid the darkness of this night, as we yearn for God’s light to shine and eagerly anticipate the coming of a wonderful counselor, mighty god, everlasting father, and prince of peace; we rejoice that he is more than just a baby: He is Christ, the Lord, the Promised Messiah, the Blessed Savior, God with us. Joy to the World! The LORD is born. Amen.

Prayer: Thank you God for sending Your Son on one glorious night to be born a virgin, to live a perfect life and to die on the cross for my sins. Thank you that he rose from the dead three days later and that this Christmas and every Christmas we can celebrate the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sources: Based on a sermon by Rev. Elizabeth Lovell Milford, Christmas Eve 2017. <https://www.heritagepres.com/christmas-eve-sermon-more-than-just-a-baby-isaiah-92-7-luke-21-20/>. Retrieved December 20, 2022.

**More than Just a Baby**

Christmas Eve, December 24, 2022 Isaiah 9:2-7

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN Luke 2:1-20

There are few things in life more joyful than the birth of a baby: ten tiny fingers, ten tiny toes, little giggles and squirms, that soft, sweet smell when you hold a little one close. Tonight, we celebrate the most important birth of all time and gather in the angelic glow around the manger, hoping to get a sense of the magic and wonder and holiness that just seems a little bit closer to us on this night. The story is familiar and comforting.

New parents often share the news of their little one’s arrival. Some send text messages or post on Facebook; others do photo shoots and mail impressively beautiful cards to friends and family. In the case of the birth of Jesus, the angels take this role with royal proclamations sung throughout the hillsides. Although they didn’t mention Jesus’ weight or length or exact date of birth, they gave a pretty good message. This child is the Savior of the world, the promised Messiah, the Lord God come to earth. This is no ordinary baby.

The words of Isaiah 9 provide richness appropriate for the coming of the Savior. These words were not written with Jesus in mind. Isaiah did not “predict” the circumstances of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. But it is a powerful text, a text retold in the gospels as a disclosure of Jesus’ ministry, speaking of a great reversal coming to the people of God. Isaiah’s words reflect the hope of a people living in despair, and the coming of a long-awaited Savior who would give God’s people a future far beyond anything they experienced or even imagined.