

Unto Us a Child Is Born

The image of the baby Jesus makes us feel warm and fuzzy inside. But it should shake us out of our lethargy, if we understood the deeper message in His birth.

*“For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this” (Isa. 9:6-7).*



Isaiah’s prophecy of the birth of Jesus is a beautiful summary of the work of our Savior, beginning with His humble birth. But like any precious jewel, this prophecy is made more majestic by the setting in which it is found. Let’s take a few minutes to explore the context.

The general theme in the surrounding chapters is the Assyrian invasion that had been unleashed upon Judah (ca. 700 BC). These invaders—“the rod of My anger” (10:5)—were a bloodthirsty horde

who would do considerable damage before God would bring them to heel. This catastrophe was a judgment from God upon His own people, who had turned their backs on Him. Instead of seeking guidance from their God, the people sought it from wizards and mediums (8:19; 9:13). They spoke with “pride and arrogance of heart” (9:9). The leaders and people alike were doomed to destruction, because “everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer” (9:16-17). The prevailing message in these chapters is captured in the repetitive refrain, “for all this His anger is not turned away” (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). God’s people had given themselves over to evil and would pay dearly for their folly.

It is in the midst of this doom-and-gloom scenario that Isaiah reminds the reader of the Davidic promise, the coming of One who would bring peace and justice to the earth (9:6-7; see 2 Sam. 7:12-16). The titles worn by this Messiah reveal His qualities: Wonderful Counselor (source of wisdom), Mighty God (powerful), Everlasting Father (provider and protector), Prince of Peace (benevolent dictator). The world of the Jews was spinning out of control, but to the remnant who still looked to God, all was not lost: “the zeal of the Lord of hosts *will* perform this” (v. 7).

But when and how would this Son of David appear? Would He split the skies and burst into history leading a vast army of angels? Would He annihilate every heathen army, lay low every pagan king, and leave every evildoer trembling before His mere presence? This was the image that developed in Jewish culture through the ages. But that was not God’s way of doing things, and in Isaiah’s prophecy, He provided a clue as to how this story would play out.

The Messiah would come *as a child*—helpless, insignificant, obscure, unnoticed. He was not born into privilege or royalty, but into poverty. When the day came that He finally revealed Himself to His people, they were offended by His ordinariness. In the end, the ones who so longed to see the Son of David were blind to His presence in their midst, and they killed Him. He came as a child and died as a criminal. But His gruesome death set up His final victory in a glorious resurrection, by which He still reigns today.

In Jesus of Nazareth, we see the ultimate demonstration of God’s *modus operandi*. He brings down the proud and haughty by means of the meek and lowly. In which group do *I* belong?

— *David King*