

## “Friending Jesus”

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 2:1-20

I recently read a newspaper article that said if your last name is “Christmas”, you have a problem. It isn’t simply that your choices are limited when you have to choose a name for a baby girl. It would be cruel, for example, to call her “Mary.”

No, the bigger problem is that Facebook won’t accept you apparently, this is huge! If you submit the last name “Christmas” on Facebook’s brief online form, you’ll probably receive an automated rejection. The anonymous gatekeepers of this social networking site have decided that “Christmas” cannot possibly be a real name.

Same for the Yodas, the Beers, the Pancakes, and the Batmans. According to the article, they’ve all been rejected by Facebook, adding insult to a lifetime of injuries caused by having an unusual last name.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that a child has been born for us, a son given to us, “and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” These are unusual names that no doubt Facebook would not accept.

On this night, more importantly, are we accepting them? Isaiah tells us that the child’s “authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.” Jesus is our newborn King, the Son of David, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace.

Are we friending him? The great challenge of Christmas is to establish a strong connection with the baby born in Bethlehem. This begins by hearing a message from

Isaiah that invites us to accept the child as a powerful and loving king. We don't want to make the Facebook mistake of concluding that his names cannot possibly be real, thus rejecting him.

So, do you want to be friends with Jesus? That's the question Facebook would ask us. If you look at his profile, you would see that Jesus is a "Wonderful Counselor."

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus passes through Samaria and meets a woman at a well. He speaks with her, despite the fact she's a woman and a Samaritan, and tells her everything she has ever done. He reveals to her that he is the Messiah, and that the day is coming when the barriers between people will fall and "the true worshipers will worship the father in spirit and truth." The woman is filled with such joy that she goes to her city and spreads the word about Jesus. Many people come to see that he is the Savior of the world.

Like the woman at the well, Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor – the one who knows us most fully and loves us most deeply. He tells us the truth about ourselves and invites us to follow him in a life of worshiping God in spirit and truth.

So often, our success in life depends on the quality of our counselors. Think of recent presidents and how their closest advisors have helped or hurt them. Presidents Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama. All of them have needed counselors who could tell them the truth about themselves and keep them on the right path. Without good advisors, presidents tend to stumble. So do we.

Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God.

When Jesus' friend Lazarus becomes ill and dies, Jesus travels to the man's home in Bethany. One of Lazarus' sisters meets Jesus on the road and says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Jesus answers her: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live." For Jesus to make such an audacious statement, he has to be a raving lunatic . . . or a Mighty God. He can be only one or the other: insane or almighty.

Jesus goes to the tomb and cries, "Lazarus, come out." Lazarus is given new life and so are we, if we believe in Jesus, our Mighty God.

It's no coincidence that many of our favorite Christmas stories contain a message of new life, even if they fail to give credit to Jesus.

Think of "A Christmas Carol", which includes the transformation of the miser named Ebenezer Scrooge.

"It's a Wonderful Life" with its dramatic discovery of what really matters. "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" with the growth of the Grinch's heart, which had once been "two sizes too small." Christmas is all about moving from death to life, through the power of our Mighty God.

Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father.

When Jesus is having dinner with his disciples, his follower Philip says to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus says to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the

Father.”

The Word of God comes to us most clearly through Jesus, the one who is the flesh and blood appearance of God in human life. “In the beginning was the Word,” says the first chapter of John, “and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

The Word is eternal. The Word is God. The Word lives among us. This appearance of the Word of God in human form shows us that Jesus and our everlasting Father are one and the same.

Wonderful Counselor. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. Prince of Peace.

Jesus comes not to be a military messiah but a Prince of Peace. His endless peace is based on truth, justice, and righteousness, not on the defeat of an oppressive empire. “My kingdom is not from this world,” says Jesus when he stands in front of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. “For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

“For this I was born,” says Jesus: to testify to the truth. And those of us who belong to the truth will listen to his voice and follow him in the way of peace. “Peace is not the product of terror or fear,” said Archbishop Oscar Romero who was gunned down in an El Salvadoran church. Instead he said, peace is “the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamic. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty.”

This is the way Jesus wants us to live, making generous, tranquil contributions to the good of all. He challenges us to be dynamic, not passive, in our peacemaking.

Generous, not stingy. And dutiful, not reserving our efforts for holidays. The work of peace and reconciliation should be an everyday effort for all of us who follow Christ. After all, says the apostle Paul, God “reconciled himself to us through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthian 5:18).

We are to “friend” others, just as Jesus came to make us friends with God.

Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. On Christmas Eve let us receive him, accept him, and strengthen our connection to him. On Christmas Eve, let us celebrate and give thanks for his birth.

Luke 2:1-20 . . . In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. <sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This

will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" <sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

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