

Midweek of Advent 2

December 11, 2024

Text: Isaiah 9:1–2, 6–7

Other Texts: Titus 2:11-14 (Epistle); John 5:16–18; 8:48–59 (Gospel Reading)

“His Name Shall Be Called: Mighty God”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, He who truly is Mighty God.

Tonight, that we would continue to prepare our hearts and minds to properly celebrate the Jesus’ birth, we resume our Advent series based on Isaiah 9:6, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given . . . and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Last week we heard how the title “Wonderful Counselor” certainly rightly applied to Jesus in that His counsel is only perfect wisdom, being the very Word of God. More, His counsel actually gives the power to carry out His wisdom as His Word conveys the Holy Spirit who works repentance, faith, and new life within us. So let us remain in the Word!

Now this evening we shall focus on the second title which Isaiah was inspired to speak and write, “Mighty God.” Of course, people in Jesus’ day refused to believe that He was God in human flesh. And, as we know all too well, things haven’t changed too much. So many people today, even many who enjoy the Christmas festivities, refuse to believe that Jesus is God.

Unsurprisingly, unbelieving and skeptical scholars try to say that the translation “mighty God” is incorrect, that it should instead be translated as “great hero.” In other words, this child would be a famous man in some manner but, and this is the key point, still only a *man*. Sadly, it is important to address this as it is all too common that such “scholarly opinions” are propagated during these holy seasons. But surely there are some serious problems with this assertion.

First, recall what we said last week: this Child will be called “Immanuel,” that is, “God with us.” Does saying that He who is “God with us” is also “mighty God” say anything new?

Second, the words really cannot be translated “great hero” when one considers the larger context of the Bible. The original Hebrew אֱלֹהֵי גִבּוֹר (El Gib·bōr) is found in three other places in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 10:17 reads, “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the *mighty*, and the awesome *God*, who is not partial and takes no bribe.” In Jeremiah 32:18 we read, “You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them, O great and *mighty God*, whose name is the Lord of hosts. Finally, just one chapter after our verse Isaiah 9:6, we find these words in Isaiah 10:21: “A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the *mighty God*.”

So, based on this evidence, the title אֱלֹהֵי גִבּוֹר (El Gib·bōr) in Isaiah 9:6 *can only mean* “Mighty God.” The child born of the virgin will be called “Mighty God” because He is the very Son of God in human flesh, just as Isaiah prophesied concerning Immanuel. Just as the angel said to Mary and to Joseph before Jesus was born and which the angels declared that first Christmas.

This then takes us to our Gospel for tonight, which is taken from John chapters 5 and 8. In John chapter 5, we read about Jesus performing miracles on the Sabbath, a day when God’s people were supposed to rest from their work so they could focus on God’s work for them as Creator and Savior. But Jesus says that He must work on the Sabbath. Why does He say that?

This is more than just because it is right to do good and show mercy on the Sabbath. That is certainly true, but Jesus says the reason *He* must work is that His Father is also working! In other words, Jesus is claiming to be God by saying that He must work on the Sabbath because as God He, with the Father, upholds all creation. As it says in the book of Hebrews,

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power.

Again, let’s consider our Gospel from John chapter 8. Jesus tells the Jews who refuse to believe in Him that they are *not children of God*. Then He says that all Old Testament believers, including Abraham, believed in Him and looked forward to His coming. Now, when the unbelieving Jews hear this they say, “*How could Abraham have known You? He lived and died several hundreds of years before You were born!*” To their disbelief Jesus replies with these awesome words: “Before Abraham was, *I am.*” By these words Jesus declares Himself to be none other than the Lord who spoke to Moses from the burning bush!

Friends in Christ, there are many other passages that clearly teach that Jesus deserves the title אֱלֹהֵי גִבּוֹר (El Gib·bōr), that is, “Mighty God.” And this point cannot be stressed enough, because the devil does not want you to believe that Jesus is God in human flesh. Why is that?

You see, if Jesus was only a man, then He is *not* your Savior. Scripture is clear that only God can save us from sin, death, and the devil. “I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior.” So God gave the very first promise of the Savior saying that “the woman” would give birth to a male child who would crush the power of the devil. But as only *God* can crush Satan, then this male child born of the woman would have to be God in human

flesh.

But how would God's Son crush the devil? He would do it *by allowing Himself to be crushed by our sin, taking the punishment that He as God says it deserves*, that we might be saved from the eternal death in hell our sins earned and we rightly deserve. But again, no mere human could pay for the sin of all. As the psalmist writes, "Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life." Only a man *who is God in human flesh* could do that!

This is critical for us to understand. If God Himself was not hanging on that cross, then we are still under the curse of our sins: being a slave of the devil and doomed to eternal damnation. No wonder the devil does not want us to believe that Jesus is "Mighty God"! Because all who deny that Jesus is God either have to deny the reality of sin or they have to try to deal with their sin themselves. Very different on the surface, but both options are based upon demonic lies that would keep us from receiving the already won salvation from "Mighty God"!

Sometimes we're tempted to deny that our sin is any big deal. And yes, we Christians are guilty of this too as we excuse our own sins and hardness of heart and compare ourselves to others whose more obvious sins make us look good. But if we seriously believe that Jesus is God, then we will remember that He is with us always, sees everything and knows our hearts—including *when we are sinning against Him!* And we will remember that He will return on the Last Day in all His power and glory as Mighty God to *judge* us. Remembering these we realize we better not get comfortable with our sins, but avoid sin like the eternally deadly plague it is.

On the other hand, maybe we *do* take our sins seriously, but then we think we must deal with them ourselves. Maybe this is arrogance on our part, thinking that we can make up for our sins by doing a few good deeds to impress God, as if the perfectly holy almighty Creator would be impressed by anything that we created and corrupted creatures do. When we think like this we don't realize the full reality that we regularly confess: that our sins *deserve* God's present and eternal punishment. In practicality, we deny *that only God Himself can save us from our sins*.

But perhaps it isn't an arrogant downplaying of our sin and overconfidence in our own goodness. Perhaps it could best be called fear, maybe verging on despair, as the devil torments us into believing that not only are we accountable for our sins before God, which is true, but that we are required to pay for them as well. Perhaps our suffering the consequences of our sins, which is God's way of correcting us and keeping us on the right path, is being twisted by the devil into the lie that we are not fully forgiven, that either we must still do something more to earn forgiveness or perhaps that there is no hope of forgiveness for one as bad as me.

No of course, taking our sins seriously is necessary; *that is repentance*. But repentance is sorrow over sins and a turning away from them, but it is not the need to pay for them.

Truly, repentance is to be followed by faith in the glorious Gospel truth that only God Himself can save us from our sins *and that He already did this by sending His own Son to the cross for us*. While it is likely not our intent, when we try to deal with sin ourselves instead of repenting and trusting in Jesus, we actually deny that Jesus is Mighty God who has come to save us from our sins.

So don't deny it, *believe it!* Believe that Jesus is Mighty God, that He united you to Himself in your Baptism, washing you clean from the guilt of your sins by the power of His divine blood. Believe that Jesus is Mighty God, that His Word of Absolution sends your sins from you as far as the east is from the west. Believe that Jesus is Mighty God, that He nurtures and strengthens your faith in Him as He teaches you with His Word, guiding you in the paths of righteousness, giving you His power to resist your sinful desires, the world's lies, and the devil's temptations having overcome them for you. Believe that Jesus is Mighty God, that He gives you His own body and blood in Holy Communion to assure you that your sins are truly and fully forgiven and that He is with you until your last breath, even to the end of the age!

Yes, believe that Jesus is Mighty God, that He will help you to live as His precious and holy child in this world in the face of sin, suffering, evil, and death. For He who died rose again, He has conquered your enemies for you, and He *will* bring you into the fullness of eternal life when He returns in power and glory. Let us close by hearing from St. Paul once again.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our *great God and Savior Jesus Christ*, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.

In the name of Mighty God, even Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen!