

# Christmas Eve

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Isaiah 9:2-7

Christmas Eve

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

*2The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness –  
on them light has shined.*

*3You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.*

*4For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

*5For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.*

*6For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named*

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

*7His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.*

*He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: What's in a Name?**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *New Title***

Most readers of this passage believe that the child who is “born for us” (that is, for Judah), is Hezekiah—the good king whose reign follows Ahaz’s less-than-exemplary rule. But even before he rises to the throne Hezekiah is being harnessed with burdensome titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Could anyone possibly live into these titles? Isaiah looks forward to a day when Judah will be rescued from its oppressive yoke to Assyria. But is this yet another case of a title being given to one whom the people have no intention of endowing with corresponding authority?

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *No Authority***

If Hezekiah was indeed the “child born” for Judah, it matters little. Finally, the people refused to cooperate with God’s new plan under this child born for them. After all, it would take more than a Prince of Peace to make endless peace, and more than one Wonderful Counselor to perpetuate justice and righteousness in the midst of a whole nation. Finally, while God may have designated Hezekiah to fill David’s throne, the people did not yield to or cooperate with his authority. In essence, his titles did not command the authority they were intended to.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *No Nation Rules Forever***

The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter. And no nation

lasts forever. So we shouldn't be surprised to hear that even a good king cannot wield perpetual power or sustain a nation endlessly. It is the nature of all humans, and human ventures, to fade and ultimately die. So it has been since Adam and Eve outside of the garden, so it was for Hezekiah in Judah, and so it will always be.

## **PROGNOSIS: What's in a Name!**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Savior Rules Forever***

So it is, with all humans, and human endeavor—except for one, that is. But who could have known it, given such humble beginnings? The one human who is the exception to the rule, is also a child born for us (much like Isaiah foretold). Yes, and this one descends from the royal lineage of David too. But he begins his existence in the squalor of an animal shelter. Laid in a food trough, he lies (apparently) forgotten by a world (the Roman Empire) that has no second thought about his meagre existence. This child is not dubbed with myriad titles, or dressed in the fine linens of a king, or regaled in festival. Instead, he is wrapped in the bands of cloth that Mary and Joseph can rummage in their stall, and he bears the only title necessary: Savior. His salvation will not preserve borders, but trespass them. His meagre beginnings seem to hint at this: This Savior (see Mary's song in Luke 1), will up-end the world's expectations about a Messiah. Even the angels' song hints at the difference: in this child born for us, the war that is brought to an end is the one between God and sinners. This war breathes its final breath when Jesus willingly accepts the death he doesn't deserve, and is strung up on a cross with a title hung over his head that says more about him than anyone can then imagine: King of the Jews. This king's authority is confirmed as, in his final moments he forgives the unforgivable, and only then commends his spirit into the Father's hands. This child

“born for us,” is Son of the Most High (1:32). This status is resoundingly confirmed by the Father, when he raises this Son from the grave. His humble birth and death testify that he is not just born for a select few. His resurrection asserts that while kingdoms rise and fall, he will reign forever.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *New Authority***

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised then, that he chooses not only to be born for us, but in us as well. In the squalor of our meagre hearts, he chooses to be born. And his birth there will not be without trials: Some days we will give his birth there the same embarrassingly small nod that the Empire gave him. But as he grows, birthing his good news into our mangery hearts, we will find food in him that satisfies—forgiveness, the promise of “third” second chances, of peace with God the Father, of peace with our neighbors. There, in our hearts, he will silence the enemy (death), and make peace between us and God. We will find him to be a Savior who is also Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, and Mighty God.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Old Title, New Authority***

The child born for us continues to exercise dominion—not just in title, not just in our hearts, but in our lives as well. Lives that are humbled by conflict, and loneliness, and fragility. In those lives he comes as Savior, not only to soothe our woes, but to turn us toward a world where peace and compassion are sparse and sorely needed. There, in that world, in lives that can appear as obscure as Jesus' birth did in that little town of Bethlehem, this child born for us exercises his compassion and peace through our very own hands, hearts, and minds.