

Five Christmas gifts

«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.» (Isaiah 9:6 - NKJV)

We certainly live in a pagan society. In a secularized world, less and less familiar with the message of the Bible, Christmas has become a sort of religious folklore. This is why we need to explain and remind our contemporaries of the original meaning of Christmas. What do we actually celebrate?

Understanding who Jesus was becomes the obvious starting point to grasp the real meaning of Christmas. If it is the anniversary of Jesus' birth, then we must begin by knowing the protagonist of such a famous birthday. The passage in Isaiah 9:1-7 displays a formidable portrait through the names of Christ. Let us remember that the name of a person was very meaningful to the Hebrews because it revealed some special trait of the character. This portrait was "painted" about 800 years before his birth. Such an amazing anticipation gives an added value to the text: the fulfilled prophecies always reinforce our faith.

Five names are given to Jesus: **Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**. Strikingly the prophet uses the singular -«His name will be called»- instead of the plural, «His names». Why is it so if he immediately mentions *five* names? The attributes that hallmark the name of Jesus make an inseparable and interdependent whole as the links in a chain: we cannot take one of them separately and refuse the others. With Christ we must apply the principle of "*all or nothing*". In other words, we cannot make ourselves a "*Jesus on demand*". Jesus is all these five realities in one.

Furthermore these names follow a progressive development. It is like a window that opens letting the light go in little by little. The identity of Jesus reaches its climax as Prince of Peace. Indeed, making peace between God and Man -reconciliation through the Cross- was the ultimate reason for Christ's coming to this world (2 Cor. 5:19-21). Here lies **the core of Christmas**: «*Glory to God on high and peace on earth*». Unfortunately many people miss the full light of Jesus' identity. They only open part of the window thus hindering the light to bright fully. They admire Jesus, they think He was «Wonderful» or a wise «Counselor-Teacher»; but they refuse the whole -the five names together- which portrays Jesus as «the light of the world» (John 8:12 NKJV).

Let's consider each of these names

Wonderful

This is the first feature of Jesus. Some translations use the word «Admirable». The person of Jesus fascinates both the believer and the unbeliever. The first reaction meeting him as a man is one of amazement. We are not surprised that Einstein, a man of deep insight, referred to Him in these terms: “The radiant figure of Jesus has produced in me a fascinating impression. Actually there is only one place in the world without darkness: the person of Jesus”.

Admirable was his life. Jesus lived constantly to do good: he helped those in need, he comforted the afflicted, he healed the sick, he gave himself without reservation to others. His compassion and empathy knew no bounds. The synthesis that Peter makes of his life is very significant: «... how Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed» (Acts 10:38 NKJV)

Admirable or wonderful were his character, his kindness, his ability to love, his sensitivity, his humility, his self-control, his meekness. All these virtues adorned his life at all times. Two testimonies are meaningful. On the one hand, the Jews who were present when Jesus wept in front of Lazarus' lifeless body exclaimed: «...See how He loved him». We also read that just before that, «Jesus was *deeply moved* in his spirit and *greatly troubled*» (John 11:33-36 ESV). These two verbs convey an intensity of feelings much greater than in the average grief. The other testimony was that of Pilate, unable to find a single spot in Jesus' life: «I find no fault in Him» (John 19:4 NKJV).

Admirable were also his teachings: «...they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes» (Mark 1:22 NKJV). And so we could follow the list of reasons that made Jesus an “admirable” character.

Furthermore some unique facts in his life go beyond human wonder: the miraculous way he saved his life by escaping from the fierce persecution that Herod unleashed precisely to kill this newborn; his contradictory death as an evildoer when he had lived as a saint, the testimony of the centurion next to the cross, familiar with dozens of executions, who observed during his long agony very “unusual” aspects and that led him to exclaim: «Certainly this was a righteous Man!» (Luke 23:47 NKJV). And what shall we say about the Gospel account on his resurrection, his subsequent appearances and his final ascension to heaven? He was indeed “wonderful”, but some of His wonders cannot be explained only in human terms.

Thus, Jesus was admirable not only for his biography, his character or his teachings, but also for these unique facts that go beyond a mere natural explanation and encourage us to open the window further and let the light of His names disclosure His identity.

Counselor

This name is a consequence of the previous one. If Jesus had a sensitive and empathic character, ready to listen and understand, with a deep love for people and an unusual wisdom, these are the ideal requirements to be a good counselor.

Jesus' meeting with various men and women provide us with a paradigm of dialogue and fruitful counseling. Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the sinful woman in Simon's house and many other examples show us the unsurpassed excellence of Jesus as a Counselor. He was the healer of their lives, the one who filled their voids, the one who transformed their deserts into fruitful gardens.

Likewise today, in the 21st century, people are searching for meaning in their lives. They long for some soothing balm to relieve their loneliness, frustration and anxiety. Some spend a lot of money on fortune tellers, card casters, mediums. They want to know their future, they need a foundation for their life. In this foggy and even dark landscape, Jesus declares himself as the supreme Counselor: «Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest» (Matt. 11:28 NKJV); «I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness» (John 8:12 NKJV).

Isaiah gives us the explanation why Jesus is the supreme Counselor: «The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord» (Isa. 11:2 NKJV). Jesus is a unique Counselor because He is endowed with the Spirit of God. His wisdom is not only human, but divine. This leads us to the third name.

Mighty God

Many people “close the window” here. They are happy with an admirable man or an exceptional Counselor. For them, Jesus was a great man, nothing else. The name of Christ, however, has other attributes that lead us upward to a higher dimension. If we stopped here, Christmas would only be a sad story of undeserved humiliation and persecution. Fortunately, this is not the end. The progressive disclosure of his identity reveals that he was not just a man. «Mighty God» is the next step in our knowledge of Christmas' central figure.

Jesus was God and as such is powerful, mighty. His life was a demonstration of this supernatural power: He was mighty to heal the sick, to silence the storm, to give life to the dead, to dominate the evil forces. And above all He was mighty to rise from the grave and leave the tomb empty. Jesus, who was born in weakness, ended up defeating the most powerful forces in this world: death, sin and the devil.

This is why the early Christians had no feeling of inferiority: their Lord was victorious, the "*Christus victor*". Today we have to shake off a certain losers' complex in a society that is pleased to proclaim the "death of God" and considers Christianity obsolete, a relic from past times. Our Jesus is a Mighty God and one day «every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord» (Phil. 2:10-11 NKJV). Christmas is not so much the naive memory of a child's birth, but the transcendental reminder that there is a Mighty God who is Lord of History and Lord of my life, who will one day reign over everything. In this sense, Christmas is a source of hope and a challenge to reflect.

Everlasting Father

The idea of a Mighty God alone could convey a sense of remoteness or coldness. Someone could say that the sovereign, the almighty, is so great and so "busy" with important affairs that he has no time to be involved in my everyday life and to take care of me. This was the Greek or Roman idea of their gods.

In Christianity, however, we find a unique fact, an amazing reality which does not occur in any other religion. This mighty God is at the same time an intimate Father who loves each human being as a precious and unique creature. Jesus, «the image of the invisible God» (Col. 1:15 NKJV) reflects this warm personal love of the Father. Christ showed deep tenderness, affection and care to many on many occasions during his days on Earth. The illustration of the good shepherd is an excellent example: «I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep... My sheep are mine and neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand» (John 10:11, 27-28 NKJV). Notice also how by the end of his life Jesus cries over Jerusalem: «How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!» (Luke 13:34 NKJV). Could we think of a greater expression of motherly love?

This is a crucial point in the Christian experience. Going up from the third name «Mighty God» to the fourth «Everlasting Father» implies a personal encounter where God is not anymore a distant "He", but a nearby "You". It is the decisive step that separates mere theism from Christianity. Jesus is not only the almighty God who created the universe (John 1:3), but also the friend of all those who follow him (John 15:14-15). Through this personal encounter with Jesus, God ceases to be a concept to become a real person to us, a person with whom I can have a living, close relationship: «Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself...» (John 15:4 NIV).

Prince of Peace

The light reaches here its maximum splendor. The window is now wide open. The climax of Jesus' identity is before us. The last name given to Him is the

culmination of the previous ones. Christ is born to bring peace. The Gospel is good news and the message of Christmas accurately sums up this news: «I bring you good tidings of great joy... For there is born to you this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord» (Luke 2:10-11 NKJV). He is a Prince -although he was born in humiliation- and has come to bring peace.

It is a peace on three levels. Above all, it is peace with God. The core of Jesus' mission on Earth was to provide a bridge between God and Man. Reconciliation with God through Christ is the most urgent need we have as human beings. Christmas is the actual beginning of the most formidable rescue operation in History. God came down to rescue -to save- man from his dungeon, sin. No wonder Jesus' name means «He will save His people from their sins» (Matt. 1:21 NKJV).

Likewise it is peace among men. In a bleeding world, where we witness unceasing violence, Jesus is the only one who can tear down the walls and fences that separate families, peoples, races, because He is the source of forgiveness and reconciliation. Finally, Jesus provides inner peace, peace with oneself. He promised «Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you» (John 14:27 NKJV). Peace and peacemaking are inherent in the person of Christ and we, his followers, have the great privilege and responsibility to incarnate and proclaim His peace.

This Jesus is the best Christmas gift. It is the gift that God Himself gave us. It is the gift that we can share with others. May the **Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father** and **Prince of Peace** live in our hearts.

Dr. Pablo Martínez

Dr. Pablo Martínez is a psychiatrist and he currently works at a private practice in Barcelona. He develops a valued ministry as lecturer and teacher in many European countries on topics like “Mind and faith”, “The therapeutic value of the Gospel in emotional problems” or “Taking care of yourself”. His books dealing with such issues have been translated into 16 languages. He teaches Pastoral Theology and his ministry as a Bible teacher is also very appreciated. He chairs the “Ravi Zacharias Foundation” in Spain and he is honorary president of the Grupos Bíblicos Universitarios (GBU - IFES).

The web **Christian Thought** gives information about the literary work of Dr. Pablo Martínez and his father Rev. José M. Martínez. Through this work the christian thought of the authors flows covering a wide range of subjects; theological, psychological and ethical issues are considered from a biblical perspective with a relevant and practical application to current problems.

*Copyright © 2019, Dr. Pablo Martínez
Integral or partial reproduction of this article is authorized
whenever the name of the author and its source are mentioned
(<http://christian-thought.org>)*