

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	22	Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Isaiah 9:6-7	
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## The Virgin Birth of Jesus

### 14. Lord's Day

**Question 35.** What is the meaning of these words “He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary”?

**Answer:** That God's eternal Son, who is, and continues (a) true and eternal God, (b) took upon him the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, (c) by the operation of the Holy Ghost; (d) that he might also be the true seed of David, (e) like unto his brethren in all things, (f) sin excepted. (g)

(a) Rom. 1:4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: Rom. 9:5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. (b) 1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. Rom. 1:3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; Col. 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: (c) Gal. 4:4 But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, Luke 1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. Luke 1:42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. Luke 1:43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (d) John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. Matt. 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Matt. 1:20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (e) Ps. 132:11 The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. Rom. 1:3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; 2 Sam. 7:12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. Luke 1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: Acts 2:30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; (f) Philip. 2:7 But

made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: Heb. 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; Heb. 2:17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. (g) Heb. 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Back in the mid-90's I preached a series of sermons on *The Apostles' Creed*. Just before I finished the series I met with an individual who informed me that he had decided to leave Redeemer and find another church because the preaching here did not make him feel good. He went on to explain that he thought this was what preaching should really aim to do, and if I were to change my style and emphasis in the pulpit, the church would attract more people and have a better ministry. When I asked him to explain what "feel good" preaching meant, he quickly responded by saying it must be *Biblical* in nature (but of course), but not distinctively *doctrinal* (as if the two were somehow in conflict). He ended up giving me some specific sermon topics like "Improving Your Marriage" and "Coping with Stress." He concluded by advising me to lighten up in the pulpit by telling more jokes and humorous anecdotes. Earlier in this century, J. Gresham Machen took note of this same kind of mindset and called this syndrome the "tyranny of the practical."<sup>1</sup> In Machen's day, this was what characterized the growing liberalism in the mainline denominations. Today it is a crisis that is welling up within the ranks of professing Evangelicals. Increasingly, Evangelicals choose the churches they attend not because of any specific doctrinal concerns, but because of the smorgasbord of programs offered to meet "felt needs." What really matters is how I feel and what I experience. Since theology or doctrine does not make me feel good, then I will find a church that caters to my need to feel good. This is, I submit, symptomatic of a very large number of people who flock to the various mega-churches today. But it is also dangerous. It is dangerous because it is impossible to live the Christian life in the absence of Christian truth.<sup>2</sup> This section of the catechism deals with the *Apostles' Creed* and with one of the foundational articles of Christianity: the virgin birth.

"When we hear of some great undertaking to be performed, we inquire, of course, about the person who is chiefly concerned in it; so, when we are told of the mighty works Jesus Christ engaged to perform, to redeem a lost world, to satisfy Divine justice, to make an end of sin, to abolish death, and to bring life and immortality to light; the first question that occurs is, 'Who is he?'" so inquired good old John Newton, the 18th century hymn-writer who gave us "Amazing Grace."<sup>3</sup> Newton directs us to Isaiah 9:6-7 and says: "This text, if it stood alone in the Bible (supposing the Scriptures to be a revelation from God), would be a full warrant and firm foundation, for that great point of Christian faith and doctrine, that Jesus Christ is very God and very man."<sup>4</sup>

The context of the passage from Isaiah must not be ignored. Beginning in 9:1, the prophet's words describe darkness and gloom all about! It is a time of great distress. All around the prophet were clouds of darkness. "He heard," says Spurgeon, "prophetic thunders roaring, and he saw flashes of the lightnings of divine vengeance; clouds and darkness, for many a league, were scattered through history; but he saw far away a bright spot--one place where the clear shining came down from heaven."<sup>5</sup> Isaiah calls this "a great light." The darkness of sin can only be dispelled by light and light is the gift of God (Genesis 1:3). "It cannot be produced from a human heart which itself is in darkness. The whole work of Christ and all the blessings which He brings may be characterized by the one word *light*."<sup>6</sup> In Isaiah 7:14 (cited in Matthew 1:23), the virgin born son called "Immanuel" is announced. Now the child who brings light and rejoicing (9:3) is introduced in greater detail.

## I. THE NAMES OF THE IMMANUEL CHILD

The word "child" appears first in the Hebrew text, for all the weight and emphasis fall upon it – and it is for us that He is to be born.<sup>7</sup> The Child is worthy to bear these names. They are accurate descriptions and designations of His being and character. In the Bible, the name indicates the character, essence or nature of a person or object. As Young correctly points out, "When,

therefore, it is stated that He shall be called, we are to understand that the following names are descriptive of the Child and deserve to be borne by Him."<sup>8</sup> The translation of the KJV gives the impression that there are five names, but actually there are four (as rendered in the NIV). These are double-membered names.

A. WONDERFUL COUNSELLOR (Hebrew PELE YOETZ)

The word "wonderful" is not an adjective but a noun, so literally this expression is "Wonder-Counsellor." As a *Counsellor*, He is a *Wonder*. There is none like Him. The word PELE is used in Exodus 15:11 and Psalm 77:15 to describe the acts of God. In Judges 13:18 the Angel reveals the fact that He is deity by stating: "Why do you ask my name? It is Wonderful." This, as Hengstenberg observes, "means my whole nature is wonderful, of unfathomable depth, and cannot therefore be expressed by any human name."<sup>9</sup> Such counselling is only given by God (cf. Psalm 16:7; 32:8 and especially Isaiah 28:29). To designate this child with such a title is to make the clearest affirmation that He is deity.<sup>10</sup>

B. MIGHTY GOD (Hebrew 'EL GIBBOR)

In prose the word 'EL usually appears with other words such as 'EL SHADDAI, 'EL 'ELYON. Liberal scholars have argued that 'EL GIBBOR does not refer to deity since 'EL in the plural (ELOHIM) may have reference to men (as in Psalm 82:1, 6). But 'EL, especially in Isaiah, is always used in reference to God alone (cf. 10:21). Furthermore, it is used as a personal name (Isaiah 31:3 cf. also Jeremiah 32:18 and Deuteronomy 10:17). The Gospels repeatedly stress the power of Christ (Matthew 28:18). Jesus declares that He has overcome the world (John 16:33); we may be of good cheer because our Savior is the "mighty God."

C. THE EVERLASTING FATHER (Hebrew ABSHI 'AD)

"The word 'AD," says Young, signifies perpetuity or duration. It may have the sense of eternity, as when Isaiah speaks of the 'high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity...' (57:15)."<sup>11</sup> This again signifies that character of the Child. Elsewhere we read of God described as Father (Isaiah 63:16; Psalm 103:13). Why is the Son called the Father? It is in relation to His people. He is a King who cares for His subjects the way a father cares for his children (cf. Isaiah 22:21; II Kings 13:14; Psalm 68:5). The quality of this fatherhood is defined by the word eternity. Again, this can only have reference to deity.<sup>12</sup> "The name means that the Messiah is eternal and paternal in relation to His people."<sup>13</sup>

D. THE PRINCE OF PEACE (Hebrew SAR SHALOM)

This stands purposely at the end and is very emphatic. He establishes Peace. In as much as the peace to be made is eternal, it becomes obvious that more than a temporary cessation of earthly hostilities is in view here. The *cause* of all strife and misery must be addressed, namely, human sin. Peace can only be established when sin is addressed – this first and foremost – has reference to the enmity which existed between God and humanity. The Prince of Peace must make peace by dealing with sin – and this is exactly what the Lord Jesus did do (cf. Romans 5:1).

**CONCLUSION:** Taken together, the four names given to this child are an extension of the name IMMANUEL. He does only what God can do because of who He is, "God-with-us." At this time of the year when our minds are so easily distracted by the season (!), let us heed the words of the Puritan Thomas Manton on this passage: "To increase our reverence, and that the ignominy of his cross may not obscure his glory, nor lessen his respect in our hearts, but that we may have high and honourable thoughts of our humbled Lord in his lowest estate. Let us give much thought to Isaiah 9:6, 7 and why so?...When we are meditating only upon his humiliation, the natural atheism which is in our hearts is apt to turn those

thoughts into a snare, and our respects to the majesty of Christ are abated. Therefore we ought again and again to consider his divine nature, and that glorious estate wherein he was from the beginning, so to balance our thoughts of his humiliation."<sup>14</sup> **What child is this? He is Jesus, the One who saves His people from their sin. He is Immanuel.**

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> J.G. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Eerdmans, 1946), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> This theme is handsomely developed by R. Scott Clark in his article "The Importance of Being More than Earnest" in *Modern Reformation* (Sept./Oct. 1996), pp. 10-12.

<sup>3</sup> *The Works of John Newton II* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), p. 340.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *A Treasury of Spurgeon on the Life and Work of Our Lord: The Messiah* (rpt. Baker, 1979), p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> E.J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-18* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 325.

<sup>7</sup> Young writes: "Isaiah had already pointed out (7:14) that the Messiah would be with us (IMMANUEL) to bring us blessing; here He is to be for us (LANU). At the same time this LANU is to be contrasted with the LAKEM (to you) of Isaiah 7:14." *Ibid.* p. 330.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>9</sup> E.W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament I* (rpt. MacDonald Publishing Co., N.D.), p. 449. "Revelation 19:12 is to be compared, where Christ has a name written that no man knows but He himself to intimate the immeasurable glory of His nature. That which is here, in the first instance, said to all others, holds true of His whole nature; the King is a Wonder as a Counsellor, because His whole person is Wonderful," *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> This is an example of what is known as "prophetic paradoxes." A prophetic paradox is made up of two or more prophecies each of which contains a seeming contradiction with no real absurdity involved and present an enigma which, without a clue to its fulfillment, seems impossible to solve. Consider some of these impossible contrasts: God will come to earth to be born as a child. The Messiah will be begotten by God, yet He will be God. He will be providentially, even miraculously, fulfilled in the life of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament. Cf. F. John Meldau, *The Prophets Still Speak: Messiah in Both Testaments*, (rpt. Christian Victory Publishing, 1988), p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Young, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

<sup>12</sup> Note the remarks of the Puritan giant, John Owen: "And this may be added to the other names of God that are attributed to Christ: as *Adonai*, Psalm 110:1; - *Elohim*, Psalm 45:6; Hebrews 1:8; - *Jehovah*, Jeremiah 23:6, 33:16; Malachi 3:1; Psalm 83:18; - *God*, John 1:1; - *The true God*, 1 John 5:20; - *The great God*, Titus 2:1." *The Works of John Owen*, XII (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 315.

<sup>13</sup> Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah: A New Translation and Commentary* (The Spearhead Press, 1971), P. 165.

<sup>14</sup> *The Works of Thomas Manton XX* (Maranatha, N.D.), p. 403.