

The Faces of Advent

Hope in God's Promises – The Prophet Isaiah

The importance of the book of Isaiah cannot be understated. Isaiah is the most frequently quoted prophet in the New Testament, referenced over 100 times. His book carries two major themes. First, Isaiah exposes the spiritual decline of Israel, God's chosen people, and how they turned away from the One who rescued them. Second, he reveals God's love for His people by prophesying about the coming Messiah. Because of these themes, Isaiah's writings were well-known long before Christ's birth and continued to be central during and even after Christ's resurrection.

This becomes especially clear in Luke 4, when Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue and applies the prophecy to Himself:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me...He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor...to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor ([Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 61:1](#)).

Isaiah's prophecies brought hope to the people as they waited for the Savior, while also calling them back to God.

Even now, living after Christ's incarnation, Isaiah's prophecies haven't become less important; in fact, they have become even more meaningful. We can now see their fulfillment with so much more clarity. Isaiah speaks about many aspects of the incarnation, such as the virgin birth ([Isaiah 7:14](#)), the Messiah coming from the root of Jesse ([Isaiah 11:10](#)), and His humble appearance ([Isaiah 53:2](#)). But here, we will focus on a verse found in [Isaiah 9:6](#) (LXX), also chanted in the Monday Theotokia:

For a child has been born to us, a son given to us, whose sovereignty rests upon His shoulders, and He is called the Messenger of Great Counsel.

To understand this verse more deeply, we can reflect on it in three parts:

“A child has been born to us, a son given to us”

The Church Fathers explain that this verse expresses the unity of Christ's humanity and divinity. St. Ambrose teaches that the word “child” points to Christ's real human birth, while “son” affirms His eternal divinity. Christ was born of the Virgin according to His humanity, yet eternally begotten of the Father according to His divinity, yet He remains one person, not two.

St. Ephraim marvels at this mystery, saying it is “a wonder that God would reveal Himself as a baby”. The Church also highlights the phrase “a Son given to us” throughout Holy Week, especially on Covenant Thursday in the readings related to Abraham and Isaac. The Monday Theotokia also echoes this:

Celebrate and rejoice, • O race of men, • for, in this manner, • God loved the world •
[in] that He gave • His beloved Son • that those who believe in Him • may live forever. •
For He was overcome • by his tender mercies • and has sent to us • His exalted arm. •

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God's love for us is so incredibly unfathomable that the church paradoxically highlights it to us by saying that God was "overcome"—not by the enemy, not by us, not by hatred, but by "His tender mercies", by His love for us.

"Whose sovereignty rests upon His shoulders"

Several Church Fathers connect this directly to the Cross. St. Ambrose describes the Cross as the "beginning" of Christ's kingship, the power that opened the way for the martyrs and all believers. Origen teaches that Christ reigned "on the wood," with the Cross He carried on His shoulders serving as the throne of His divine love.

His Grace Bishop Epiphanius also links this verse to [Psalm 95:10](#) (LXX) and interprets the verse beautifully: "His sovereignty is the cross upon which Christ reigned. He reigned on all of our souls through the cross."

"Messenger of Great Counsel"

The phrase can also be translated as "Angel of Great Counsel," because the word "angel" simply means messenger. This title emphasizes that Christ, the eternal Word of God, is the One who reveals the divine and "great counsel" of the Trinity to humanity. He is the Messenger, not as a created angel, but as the divine Son who makes known the Father's will and brings salvation to the world.

May we celebrate and rejoice in God's love for us and experience his sovereignty on the Cross in our hearts through the intercession of Isaiah the Prophet and the Theotokos.

Sources

- Bible, ESV & LXX (Brenton's Septuagint Translation)
- Catena Bible
- Commentary on Isaiah, Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty
- The Coptic Psalmody, Daniel Girgis
- The Incarnation and Salvation in Liturgy, Bishop Epiphanius El Makary