

Unto Us a Child Is Born

1. Warm-up Question: What's one of the best Christmas gifts you've ever given or received?
2. On Christmas, God gave us the ultimate gift – Jesus. Seven hundred years before Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah uttered a famous Christmas prophecy: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6. The four descriptive titles in this prophecy help us understand the powerful positive impact Jesus can have on our lives. Each Sunday in December, we'll explore a different descriptor, starting with Wonderful Counselor.
 - a. Who's someone that's been a wonderful counselor in your life? Give us an example of how their counsel has helped you.
 - b. The Bible says, "There is safety in many counselors." Proverbs 11:14. Why is it so important for each of us to have good counselors? What can a counselor do for us that we can't do for ourselves?
3. Each of us encounters situations in life where we don't know what to think, or why it's happening, or what we're supposed to do next. The Bible promises that when we find ourselves in those places – large and small – Jesus is right there with us, ready to be our Wonderful Counselor. Our Gospel reading on Sunday elaborated on how this counseling function occurs. Read John 16:5-14, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. In verse 7, Jesus says "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send the Helper to you." Later Jesus makes clear that the Helper is the "Spirit of truth," i.e., the Holy Spirit. Why is it better to have the Holy Spirit than to have Jesus physically present with us on earth? What are the advantages of the Holy Spirit?
 - b. In verse 12, Jesus told his disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." When in your life has God wanted to say something to you, but you weren't able or willing to hear it?
 - c. The Spirit of truth is with us every moment wherever life takes us, even when we try to run from God. Jeff told a story of a pastor of a large church who collapsed under the pressure and abandoned both church and family. He ran off to Canada and took a job as a logger. There, one night when he was in despair, the Spirit of the Risen Christ spoke to him, saying, "I am with you, and I am for you, and you will get through this. I promise." When have you been farthest from God? How did God draw you back?
4. In John 16:13, Jesus says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide you into all truth." In verse 8, Jesus says, "When the Spirit comes, the Spirit will convict

- the world about sin and righteousness and judgment.” In other words, if we’re open to it, the Spirit of truth will guide our convictions about what’s wrong (sin), what’s right (righteousness), and how to judge various situations (judgment).
- a. Is there something happening in your life right now that the inner voice of the Spirit is telling you is wrong and needs to change?
 - b. Is there a decision pending in your life right now where the inner voice of the Spirit is telling you what’s the right thing to do?
 - c. Is there a situation in your life right now that’s confusing, but you sense that the inner voice of the Spirit is guiding your judgment/discernment in a certain direction?
 - d. How can we distinguish the inner voice of the Spirit from our own potentially misguided thoughts and motives?
5. Your most valuable possession is your eternal soul. It’s the only part of you that’s never going away. Jesus said, “What does it profit a person to gain the whole world, but lose their own soul? Or what shall a person give in exchange for their soul?” Mark 8:36. That’s why we’re here on earth – to grow and actualize our eternal souls. Jeff said, “We tend to think of God’s will as being primarily about what we’re supposed to do in life. But what if God’s will is less about what we’re supposed to do and more about who we’re supposed to be and become, so that all the experiences of life are about shaping and growing your soul, so that with everything that happens, the Spirit of truth, like a wonderful therapist, asks: What can you learn from this? How can this make you better?”
- a. Do you agree with the idea that God is more concerned with the kind of being we’re becoming than with how much we do and accomplish? Why or why not?
 - b. If God’s is more concerned with the kind of being we’re become than how much we do and accomplish, how should that realization change our perspective on life? (Remembering Tara Wakefield’s story might suggest some ideas. Tara felt called to be a missionary and married someone who shared that call. But the marriage ended in divorce, dashing her dreams. Now Tara realizes God used the divorce to break her of perfectionism and help her rebuild her relationship with God on grace rather than performance.)
 - c. Think of a significant experience you’ve had during this current year. Tell us what that experience was and what you sense the Wonderful Counselor is trying to accomplish in you through that experience. What can you learn from it? How can it make you better?

Reminder: LifeJourney’s Giving Tree is helping 12 children (in our church and beyond) have a wonderful Christmas. Each gift tag on the tree each contains one gift (some inexpensive,

others more so). If you want to participate, email DeaconStephLJC@google.com and she will send you instructions and gift options to choose from. Gifts are due this Sunday, December 12.

John 16:5-14

⁵Jesus said, "Now I am going to the One who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'"

⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send the Helper to you. ⁸The Helper will convict the world about sin and righteousness and judgement: ⁹about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

¹²I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide you into all the truth; for the Spirit will not speak on its own, but will speak whatever it hears, and will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴The Spirit will glorify me, because it will take what is mine and declare it to you."