

# Names of the Messiah: Mighty God

## by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

### Prayer of Illumination

Mighty God, open our hearts and our minds as we continue to explore the ancient royal titles that bear witness to your Son, the Messiah. By your Spirit guide us as we prepare for the coming of Jesus. Amen.

### Background

There are 184 verses in the New Testament about Christ's birth. These 184 verses presuppose or quote the words of 170 verses from 18 different Old Testament books. One German philosopher put it this way:

The life of Jesus was "written long before his birth."

Jesus himself believed this and taught this. In John 5, Jesus says:

*"If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."* John 5:46 (NRSV)

Last week we talked about the first title—*Wonderful Counselor*—who gives us wonder-filled and divine wisdom for godly living. In this second title—*Mighty God*—we see that our hope in the newborn king is a hope and strength in One who is *so much more than a mere human king*.

*Let's hear now from:*

### Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7 (NRSV)

For 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.  
His 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.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – Names of the Messiah: Mighty God

*For Unto Us A Child Is Born* from Handel's *Messiah* plays in the background as the sermon begins. The lyrics are from Isaiah 9:6:

*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*

There is great power in music to convey what really matters to us human beings. Spiritual realities can be expressed through music in a way that mere words can't fully accomplish. George Friderick Handel composed the *Messiah* in an amazingly short period of time—in roughly three to four weeks in the fall of 1741—writing furiously from morning till night, day in and day out.

The *Messiah* was different from any of Handel's previous compositions—instead of a story based around conflict between leading characters, the *Messiah* tells the story of Jesus in three parts—the birth of Jesus, his passion, and finally his resurrection.

The *Messiah* was originally an Easter piece, but over the decades it became tied to Christmas. Handel's annual benefit concerts for his favorite charity, the Foundling Hospital, always included *The Messiah*. London's Foundling Hospital was a home for abandoned and orphaned children. For it was to such as these that the *Messiah*—the Mighty God—came to rescue and restore.

The *Messiah* was first performed in the Musick Hall of Dublin on April 13, 1742. A record seven hundred people were in attendance. The air was electric. To maximize space and seats, the management pleaded with the women to please "wear dresses without hoops."

In addition to Handel's already legendary status, many also came to glimpse at the contralto, Susannah Cibber, who was embroiled in a scandalous divorce at the time. From the opening line, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God," the audience was entranced.

When at the midpoint, the soloist Cibber belted out: "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"—a minister leapt to his feet and declared, "Woman, for this be all thy sins forgiven thee!"

Mozart would later say this of the *Messiah*:

"Handel knows better than any of us what will make an effect. And when he chooses, he strikes like a thunderbolt."

The second royal title of Isaiah 9 conveys God's divine thunderbolt, the *Messiah* himself: "Mighty God." It's from this title that we see the *Messiah* is set apart from all men—a man, yet as Isaiah prophesies, also "Mighty God."

I like how Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall put it:

"So if I'm asked, "Do you believe in the divinity of Christ?"

I answer, "Yes, otherwise how could he have been so wonderfully human?"

And if I'm asked, "Do you believe in the humanity of Christ?"

I answer, "Yes, otherwise how could he have been so profoundly oriented toward God?"

We saw last week how the throne name given to the Messiah in Isaiah 7 is "Immanuel"—God with us. We learn even more about the Messiah's character with this royal title "Mighty God" or in Hebrew, El Gibbor. This title shows us what kind of God is with us—a mighty God is with us—who has the valor and power and authority to bring deliverance from captivity and victory over sin and death.

This is the hope that we have—our God who comes near is the God of the Exodus, who has the power to say to the powers that be, "let my people go!"

Human history has been the story about the quest for power, the discovery of power, and the harnessing of power:

- Manpower
- Firepower
- Horsepower
- Steam power
- Wind power
- Electric power
- Battery power
- Solar power
- Atomic power

Each of these forms of power have brought us wealth and countless conveniences. Yet all these powers have been unable to free our hearts from the power of greed and self-destruction.

The Messiah—Mighty God—provides the power for us that is lacking in our lives—SPIRITUAL POWER. The mighty power of the Messiah isn't expressed with a fist, sword, or the barrel of a gun, but with the power of love that stills storms, forgives sins, and restores soundness of mind. Luke describes Jesus this way, that he was "mighty in deed and word." Luke 24:19 (NRSV)

The power of our Mighty God brings change, restores sanity, and delivers true and lasting freedom. Our mighty God's spiritual power frees us to live for God and to serve others. In the 19th century, Lord Acton said: "absolute power corrupts absolutely." But the Almighty God's power absolutely cleanses and cares for his people. The Mighty God's power leaves an afterglow of character and compassion, not the aftermath of corruption.

Jesus has been one of the most influential figures in world history. But there's something different about him—that sets him apart from all others. He had a ring of authority, but he used his power to serve and to set free.

- It's before Christ that we say in astonishment with the disciples: *Who is this that even wind and wave obey him?*
- It's with the Pharisees that we wonder to ourselves: *Who is this who even forgives sins?*
- And with the formerly doubting, now believing Thomas, that we exclaim before the risen and reigning Christ: *My Lord and my God!*

Jesus himself didn't give us room to see him as merely a great figure in human history. In Exodus, God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush—do you remember the name that God revealed to Moses?

*I AM who I AM.*

Fast forward centuries later to Christ's ministry. In the Gospel according to John, Jesus speaks the famous seven I AM statements:

*I AM the bread of life  
I AM the light of the world  
I AM the door of the sheep  
I AM the good shepherd  
I AM the resurrection and the life  
I AM the way and the truth and the life  
I AM the true vine*

Jesus was saying more than a series of metaphors. Seven times he had the audacity to say: I AM WHO I AM. "Before Abraham was," says Jesus, "I AM."

When you encounter the Messiah—you encounter not merely a man, you also have a face to face encounter with the Mighty God. Come and see—draw near and take a closer look at the newborn king. Gazing upon him, you'll find who God is, what God requires, and what God's purpose for your life is.

As Martin Luther said, "Scripture is the cradle in which Christ rests."

This is the message of Christmas:

- Your God came for you. He didn't send someone else.
- He came himself in pursuit of you, to seek and save the lost.

Kanye West is one of the most recognizable rappers and music producers in hip hop. He's married to Kim Kardashian. He's got a famous line of clothing. He might however be most known for his ego—there's a joke that you proclaim the depths of your love for somebody by saying, "I love you more than Kanye loves Kanye."

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Despite his fame, Kanye's life has been tumultuous to put it mildly:

- Mental breakdowns and depression
- Addiction
- Run-ins with the law
- And his lyrics on previous albums can be shocking to say the least

Several years ago, he infamously stormed the stage and took a music award from Taylor Swift. It was not a good moment. His life was seemed perpetually chaotic, erratic, and manic.

A few months ago, he dropped a new album that has lit up the charts. It went #1 on the music charts and every single song landed on the Hot 100. The title of the album? "JESUS IS KING."

Google searches for "Jesus" and "What do Christians believe?" immediately spiked after the release. His "Sunday Service" concerts have been selling out around the country. A preacher joins him in all the performances and preaches the good news. The American Bible Society has given out 9000 Bibles to confused Kanye West fans to help them figure out "what the heaven is going on" in his life and music.

Granted, "JESUS IS KING" isn't Handel's Messiah—but it's still pretty awesome. In it you hear how the Mighty God has grabbed hold of a mighty ego. The album's been on heavy rotation on our family's Spotify account.

What happened? There are doubters and there are haters, but I think Kanye has had a real encounter with the Mighty God.

*"I was just under the weight of my sin," Kanye said, "and I was being convicted that I was running from God, and I knew I needed to make things right, so I came to Christ—I came out of darkness and came into the light."*

Lyrics from Kanye's "God Is" album are displayed on screen as the music plays in the background:

Everything that hath breath, praise the Lord  
Worship Christ with the best of your portions  
I know I won't forget all He's done  
He's the strength in this race that I run

Every time I look up, I see God's faithfulness  
And it shows just how much He is miraculous  
I can't keep it to myself, I can't sit here and be still  
Everybody, I will tell 'til the whole world is healed

King of Kings, Lord of Lords, all the things He has in store  
From the rich to the poor, all are welcome through the door  
You won't ever be the same when you call on Jesus' name

Listen to the words I'm sayin', Jesus saved me, now I'm sane  
And I know, I know God is the force that picked me up  
I know Christ is the fountain that filled my cup  
I know God is alive, yeah

Yes, the Messiah is our Mighty God—

Whether you're Handel or a hip hop artist—the same Jesus is still rescuing, touching, healing,  
and sending us out in his powerful name, that's the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Amen.

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