

Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates. "In honor of this holy season," Saint Peter said, "You must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven."

The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on. "It represents a candle," he said. "You may pass through the pearly gates," Saint Peter said.

The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, "They're bells." Saint Peter said, "You may pass through the pearly gates."

The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's glasses.

St. Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, "And just what do those symbolize?"

The man replied, "They're Carol's."

This morning, we continue our Advent sermon series. We've been studying the names of Christ found in the Old Testament book of Isaiah:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." -- Isaiah 9:6

As we mentioned last week, the prophet makes it clear that the Messiah would be Mighty God. The Messiah would be no ordinary man. Not a mere political or military leader; not the king of an earthly dominion. The Messiah would be absolutely unique. He would be God in the flesh. God with all his power and wisdom would be fully revealed in the person of a human being. The gospel of Matthew in the New Testament makes this same point in its version of the

Christmas story : “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”(Matthew 1:23)

That’s what Jesus was. "God is with us". Not God is out there somewhere beyond the boundaries of the universe, but God is here in our midst. God is walking among us as a flesh-and-blood person. Jesus, our Lord is Mighty God.

Isaiah 63:16 says, “For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name.”

Ancient Israel addressed God as Father. In a patriarchal tradition the father was the final supervisor and guarantor of family life. It became an image for God. In this way of thinking, God is the supreme father. Protection and the well-being of God’s family is the work of God. That’s what the title "Everlasting Father" signifies.

However, it is not a surprise that the title of “Everlasting Father” does not work very well for Jesus, even though Jesus is the king who will restore well-being. The reason is that Jesus addresses God as Father in the Fourth Gospel. For example, Jesus taught disciples prayer in Matthew 6:9, “Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” Thus, we can understand Jesus as the Son who prays to the Father. How can we understand Jesus as “Everlasting Father”?

The Father takes responsibility for His family. But Jesus takes up that task that belongs to the Father. Jesus plays the role of family-making, family-protecting, and family generating father.

Let’s look at that verse again:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)

By referring to the Messiah as "Everlasting Father," Isaiah alludes to the fact that the Messiah would be God. He would be their savior. He would be their deliverer. He would be their protector.

The father's role as "everlasting" is to stretch over the generations. Jesus is indeed the carrier of the family promises. It means that all of his promises will be fulfilled. Whatever he said will happen. He has the power to do what he said he would do. He won't change his mind. He won't go back on his word. He won't discover new information and suddenly change his plans. He is God, and so his purposes are unchanging.

Hebrews 13:8 says "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." He can be trusted. We can rely on him, and entrust our lives to him, in a way that we can't with any other person. Because we know that nothing is going to happen that will make him either unable or unwilling to care for us, now or in the future. Jesus Christ is eternal, everlasting, without beginning or end of days.

Businesses and corporations don't last. Governments and kingdoms don't last. Even people don't last. No matter how much your parents love you, no matter how much your husband or wife cares for you, if you live long enough there will come a day, their lives will someday come to an end, and there's nothing they can do about it.

But Jesus is different. In the conclusion of Matthew, his promise to his disciples is, "I am with you always, to the end of the age. Also, Jesus promises in Hebrews 13:5, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." That's why Jesus' eternity

matters. That's why we care that Jesus will never change, and never cease to exist. He will always be our provider, and protector, and our savior. He will always be our refuge, and our strength. His love for us will never cease, either in this world or the next. In him, we will have eternal joy, and hope, and glory, and pleasure. In Christ, we will be eternally blessed and secure. Jesus will always keep his promises to us, even when other people can't or won't.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God." Jesus Christ is God and He will live forever. He will always be our God, and we will always be his people.

Now I would like to share a few verses that emphasize the different aspects of what this means, that our relationship with Christ is everlasting.

First, our joy in Him will be everlasting: Psalm 16:11 says, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

Second, our glory will be everlasting. When Christ returns, we will be transformed into something more wonderful than we can imagine, and our new, glorious life will never end. In 2 Corinthians 4:14 Paul says, "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure."

Third, God's love and goodness toward us are everlasting. Jeremiah 31:3 says, "The LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."

And finally, our salvation will be everlasting. God's punishment, and anger, and wrath were completely exhausted in the death and suffering of Christ on the cross; so that for those who are in Christ, there will never be any judgment or condemnation. God's attitude toward us will never be anything but complete love

and goodness. Listen to this promise: "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."(John 10:28)

No matter what we may be going through, whether suffering or disappointment; whether pain, or sorrow, or confusion. No matter how other people may treat us whether we've seen our highest dreams realized, or our greatest hopes in this world dashed to pieces. No matter what this life brings us, we can have peace and contentment. Because we know that everything in this world is temporary. It will soon pass away. But our life in Christ is forever. We are his people and He is our Everlasting Father, now and forever.