

Andrew K. Frey      Midweek Advent 1      Isaiah 7:10-14  
**Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, <sup>11</sup> “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”**

<sup>12</sup> **But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”**

<sup>13</sup> **Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (NIV 84)**

Theme: Immanuel

1. He is God’s sign.
2. He is God with us.

We talk a lot about the names of Jesus. A year and a half ago during for our midweek Lent services we looked at the names of Jesus under the theme, “Names of Wondrous Love.” You see the cross formed by the names of Jesus on the wall in our entry way—or something similar. The names of Jesus indicate something about him—both who he is and what he does.

And that is why it is good and right to look at the names of Jesus once again—not in view of his passion, but in anticipation of his first coming. To go back to the Prophet Isaiah, over 700 years before Christ was even born. Today we see Isaiah’s name for the Promised Messiah: Immanuel. He is God’s sign and he is God with us.

Ahaz was the wicked King of Judah—the southern Kingdom. And King Ahaz had a problem. The Kings of Aram and Israel, here called Ephraim, weren’t happy that Ahaz refused to join them to attack Assyria, so they in turn decided to attack Judah. So the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz to assure him that Israel and Aram would not succeed in defeating him and his country. And to assure Ahaz that he would keep his promise to protect him the Lord told him to ask for any sign. **Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.** He could have asked for anything—whether big or small.

But what did Ahaz do? He refused. **I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.** It may seem as if Ahaz was sincere; he tried to

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pass it off as if he is godly, as if cared about God and his Word. But he was anything but sincere; the rest of his life indicates this. Here is the Lord’s summary on Ahaz recorded in 2 Kings 16, **Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.** God wanted to give Ahaz a sign of assurance. But Ahaz insulted the Lord by defiantly rejecting his offer. Clearly Ahaz had no regard for the Lord, his prophet, or his promises of protection. And arrogantly he later chose to go at it without the Lord by allying himself with Assyria. Not taking what God offers is a serious sin. Think about what God offers in the visible gospel, the sacraments. He offers a washing of rebirth. He offers body and blood for the forgiveness of sin. He offers more than signs. He offers the very substance of forgiveness, life, and salvation. But many despise these gifts, doubt their power, and neglect their use. Like Ahaz they have little or no regard for the Lord, his gospel, his promises, or his servants. Their actions or lack-there-of indicates their lack of faith and love for the Lord.

And it’s not just the sacraments on which we fail to take God up on his offer. For example take God’s promise to give generously to those who give generously to him. Or what he says in 1 Peter 5 about prayer, **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** And it’s all about arrogance. Our sinful nature tells us that we can do things on our own, so we fail to pray continually as we should. We keep money for ourselves—trusting in ourselves to provide more than God.

And what makes it so vile is that many often do it under the guise of godliness. They act like they are trying to be God-fearing. The reason they don’t make use of the gospel is because they have been so busy working in order to support their family. Or in their mind it’s ok that they haven’t worship the Lord lately because they pray a lot.

They try to pass over their sins as if their godliness led them to do so. Ahaz rejected God’s request to give him a sign, so God gave him one anyway. And it’s not exactly the sign you would expect. **The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.** Now for Ahaz and other unbelievers this sign indicated destruction. In the verses that follow we see that Judah would lose its power and prestige. Ultimately the ally he thought he had made with

Assyria would come back to bite Judah in a big way—attacking the land and almost destroying it completely. This sign for unbelievers is nothing but law. Just as it is today for those who reject the Messiah. But for us believers, this is nothing but pure gospel. It is a promise of the Messiah. We deserve nothing but God's wrath and punishment for not making use of what he promises us. But instead of condemning us, the Lord gives us a sign of his love. In love God sent his Son into the world. In love he forgives us and takes us to heaven. That little child to be born is God's sign of love and forgiveness to us. Something that we don't want by nature, but something he gives to us anyway.

But not only is Jesus God's sign, he is also God with us.

It's all based on this son being born of a virgin. Some people deny that Mary was a virgin, and it is true that in some contexts this Hebrew word for virgin may mean a young woman and not necessarily a virgin. But Matthew makes it clear by using the Greek term for virgin and by saying Joseph, **had no union with her until she gave birth to a son.** So the Bible makes it abundantly clear that this woman, Mary, was a virgin. And there was no in-vitro fertilization or anything of the sort back then. It would be impossible for someone to be born of a virgin back then. This child would be no ordinary child. And how would this be possible? As Gabriel told Joseph, **what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.** As we confess each Sunday Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. We don't know how it all happened, but we know that it means that Jesus is fully man—born of a virgin woman and fully God—conceived by the Holy Spirit. This child prophesied by Isaiah is both God and man. That's summarized by one word, a name: Immanuel—God with us. Jesus is God with us. That means that Jesus is God. True God from eternity. He is the almighty creator of the universe. The one who watches over us and preserves his entire creation. From eternity he has had full divine glory, power, and majesty. He is God. And yet, he is God with us. He is also true man. God gave up the riches and glories of heaven. He gave the full use of his divine power. The almighty all glorious creator of the universe lived in a womb for nine months! He humbled himself to become like one of us. The Apostle John describes Immanuel—God with us this way in the first

chapter of his gospel, **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

Jesus is God made flesh and living among us and with us.

Why? So he can save us. Think again about this sign. The sign given to Ahaz and to us. It's the God-man. It's the Savior. God's response to Ahaz's and our sin is to send a Savior. One who wouldn't reject God's promises, one who wouldn't reject anything offered to him by God. One who would obey his law perfectly since it is his law and he can't disown himself. One who would be able to give his perfect life to us since he is one of us.

Jesus is still God with us. He is with us as he rules in our hearts through faith in him. He has made us part of his kingdom. And soon he will return to take us to his heavenly kingdom where we will be with him forever. But in the meantime Jesus is God with us in another way. He watches over us and protects us. He knows all our wants and needs and he cares for us because we are his own dear children.

Ahaz certainly received a sign—not exactly what we'd expect. As Christians, this portion of Scripture is a precious one to all of us. We hear it almost every Christmas. In it we see promises given and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is God with us. God in the flesh among us to save us, to watch over us, to take us with him forever where we will be with him in his divine glory. Amen.