

The Sign of the Birth of Immanuel

(Isa 7:14)

Hello Dear Listeners:

In these last weeks before Christmas, we turn to the prophecies of Isaiah in which he spoke of the coming of a son, who would be very special and unique. The first of these prophecies we would like to look at is found in Isaiah 7:14, where Isaiah prophesies to King Ahaz, “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.” What is the situation in Judah when Isaiah spoke these words? How were these words fulfilled?

King Ahaz was ruling over the nation of Judah at the time. He was in a difficult political situation at the time because Israel and Aram had formed an alliance with each other and were plotting against Judah. In fact the kings of Israel and Aram were marching against Jerusalem in order to attack it and conquer it. Ahaz and the people of Judah were filled with fear.

It is in this situation that the prophet Isaiah brings the word of the Lord to King Ahaz and tells him that he does not need to fear the worst. The Lord will protect Jerusalem and Judah’s enemies will be defeated. Ahaz is told that he needs to rely upon the Lord and trust in him. Rely upon the Lord and you will be able to stand in any trial and hardship.

The Lord offers further encouragement to Ahaz by telling him to ask the Lord for a sign to confirm the words spoken to him by the prophet Isaiah. But Ahaz replies that he will not ask for a sign from the Lord. This might sound pious but it is an insult to the Lord who just told him to ask him for a sign. Apparently Ahaz knows better because he has already decided to trust in the help of Assyria instead of the help of the Lord.

Yet Ahaz will receive a sign from the Lord. This is the sign: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” It should be pointed out that the word translated “virgin” in the NIV is more accurately translated “young woman”. The reason it is translated as “virgin” here is that the translators anticipate the later fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus Christ who was born from the virgin Mary.

But this prophecy is first fulfilled in the time when it was first spoken. It is not necessary to maintain that a virgin birth happened then as well. Rather the point of this sign is that this child would be a living sign of the presence of God in Judah. The Lord is still protecting his people even though their king does not deserve it and has refused to rely on the Lord.

The name of the child is Immanuel “God with us.” This child will be a living testimony of the power of the Lord. For even before this child will be able to choose right and wrong, the power of the kings whom Ahaz had feared would be destroyed. God was truly with his people. He would deliver them from their enemies and he would do so quickly.

The sign from the Lord, that child, was a testimony to this help of the Lord for his people for his name was to be called Immanuel, “God with us”. But the child born in the time of Ahaz would not be able to demonstrate in the best and fullest way that God is with us.

It is in Jesus Christ that the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 receives its ultimate and complete fulfillment. We read in Matthew 1 about how the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, happened. In the verses 22-23 we read, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ -- which means, ‘God with us.’”

It is in Christ that the meaning of the name Immanuel, “God with us” comes out in the fullest and most complete way. For the infant who was born is none other than God himself, the second person of the Triune God. God the Son came down and took upon himself our human flesh. He was born from a virgin. What a miracle! An event far above our human understanding, completely outside our normal range of experiences. The virgin Mary was with child because of the working of the Holy Spirit. In this way the chain of the never ending births of sinful children was broken so that the Saviour could be born. For it is not possible that a sinful child could pay for the sins of man himself for such a child would only increase the debt of sin even more. Jesus Christ is special. He is a holy child, one who would save his people from their sins.

He is also all powerful for Jesus Christ is God himself. In him God is very clearly with us in the fullest sense of the word. By his works and words, he showed that he was God himself made man. No one could have conceived of or imagined such a miracle.

He is the one whom the Lord has provided to give us complete redemption from all our sins. Do you put your faith and trust in him? Do you rely on Jesus Christ alone for salvation? Do not look anywhere else for consolation and comfort. We do not need to look anywhere else because in Christ God himself is with us. He is on our side. And therefore it is impossible for anyone or anything to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

In Jesus Christ, God showed in the deepest possible way that he is with us! In Jesus Christ, God has even become one of us. The King of the universe became an infant, a baby boy. He came to share in our flesh and blood in order that he might redeem us from our sins. He, the holy and majestic God, was willing to humble himself even to the point of becoming a helpless baby.

As a baby, he depended upon his mother Mary for his sustenance. He suffered throughout his life on earth. The evil one and his demons attacked him throughout his life but he stood firm in the strength of the Lord his God. As a man, he lived close to the Lord all of his days and provided an example that we should follow him and be encouraged by his example. He also did what we could never do when he offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins. He let his blessed body be nailed to the cross so that we might receive the complete forgiveness of our sins and life eternal with God.

For so many centuries, there was separation between God and man. Adam and Eve were driven from the garden of Eden and there was a chasm between God and man. In his mercy God called Abram to be the father of his special people Israel so that through him the Messiah would come. God came to his people in the old covenant in the tabernacle and temple. He dwelt with his people but still separately and only one person could come into his presence and then only once a year. Century after century, God's people had to learn about their sin and God's holiness. But all the while his plan of redemption was working itself out until the fullness of time came when God himself came down to man and became man in Jesus Christ. Surely this kind of "God with us" is way over the top and completely outside of our imagination. God dwelt with us in a far closer way than we could ever have thought possible. And now after the ascension of Jesus Christ, he has sent his Spirit into the hearts of all those who believe in him and dwells with believers in the closest possible way. Surely God is with us! And he is transforming us more and more after his image so that we will grow in holiness and be able to reflect his glory in this world. Give thanks to God for all that he has done! Look forward to the time when Jesus Christ will return from heaven. Then the new Jerusalem, the city made by God, will come down from heaven, wherein we may dwell with God forever. Then we will see him as he is and enjoy his

presence among us for all eternity! How we look forward to that great day!
Come Lord Jesus! Amen, and thanks so much for listening