

**Greetings from God our Father and from Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and from the Holy Spirit. Amen**

The Promise: A Sign will Given

Isaiah 7:10-17

For the past three Sundays, we have been looking at “The Promise” given in the Old Testament readings. The promises are for a Savior to come and save us from our sins. These promises are from God. They were given about 700 years before the birth of Christ. We know from the birth of Jesus (Christ putting on our human flesh) in the little town of Bethlehem that God keeps His promises. He remembers His promises from Old. God’s promise of sending a Savior goes back as far back as the promise given to Adam and Eve after they sinned causing all of humanity to fall into sin. Sin is still in the world with its full power. We are born into sin. The world filled with sin is full of fear and doubt, not believing God’s promises.

King Ahaz, the king of Judah, the Southern Kingdom lived in a time of fear and doubt. Syria and Israel (Northern Kingdom) had formed an alliance against Judah. They laid siege to the city of Jerusalem and were determined to destroy the Southern Kingdom (Is 7:1–2). King Ahaz should

have trusted in Yahweh to deliver him, but he was an unbeliever. He worshiped idols, and rather than seeking God's help, he turned to Assyria. Yahweh sent Isaiah to give Ahaz hope. ***And say to him, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah;*** "Do not fear" (v 4). The plan of Ahaz's enemies would fail, and Ephraim would be destroyed (vv 7–8). Ahaz should stand strong and put his faith in Yahweh (v 9). But Ahaz did not believe. Yahweh told Ahaz to ask for a sign confirming His word (vv 10–11). Ahaz refused because he preferred the help of Assyria to believing God's promise (v 12). Ahaz saw this offer of a sign as an unwanted interference in his plans. Yet Yahweh gave Ahaz the sign of Immanuel (God here with us by taking on our human flesh and uniting to Himself His fallen creation.)

***The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*** (v 14). First, the good news: Before the boy is old enough to know right from wrong, Syria and Israel will be gone (vv 15–16). Then the bad news: Because Ahaz didn't believe God, worse trouble will come upon him and Judah—the king of Assyria (v 17)! The bad news which is worst then what the King of Assyria would do..... For Ahaz, ..... the sign of Immanuel was a sign of judgment, because he saw the sign as an

inconvenience. How do you see this sign? The ***sign that a virgin (Mary) shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel.***

Immanuel means God with us!

How do you see this sign (Christ's birth) this year? Are you like King Ahaz who have other plans to trust the world and another human rather than God? Do you see that it is just another Christmas to deal with? Have you lost the true Joy or you really did not even have it to lose it. Do you see this Christmas as just another season to give gifts and get gifts. And that is all you see this season. King Ahaz trusted the King of Assyria to rescue him but the king comes, conquers and destroy Jerusalem. His help was really not help. The King of Assyria failed Ahaz. When you look at Christmas as if it was good or not in terms how much you got or if you got all your tasks finished or not (like keeping up with the Jones's). You are looking at the "sign" wrongly. You are looking at the joy that the world offers (that joy is not true joy and it only lasts shortly); you are looking for the wrong joy. Because of the lack of joy and peace, you do not find comfort from Christ being born as you ought, and thus you weary God just as Ahaz did.

The sign, that God gave Ahaz, us and the world, is Good News to you today and for all. The Good News is that God keeps His promises. Jesus loves you and died for you. God's Salvation is now seen in the birth of Jesus, Christmas morning. On that Christmas morning, so early in the morning, Angels sang praises to God. For this joyous time that Salvation has come in the form of a small babe in the manger in the small town of Bethlehem. The sign of Immanuel was Good News for Joseph and Mary. Joseph and Mary lived in a time of fear and doubt. They lived in an occupied country—Judah was under Roman rule. Mary was pregnant, but they weren't yet married, only engaged. So Joseph assumed Mary had been unfaithful to him (Mt 1:18). Joseph was considering "divorce," that is, breaking off the engagement (v 19). God sent an angel to give Joseph hope. "Do not fear to take Mary as your wife" (v 20). The baby in Mary's womb was God's Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit (v 20). God gave Joseph the sign of Immanuel. Mary's Son would be called Jesus, "for He will save His people from their sins" (v 21). This was to fulfill Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy (vv 22–23). Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us." Joseph believed God. Joseph saw this sign of the virgin birth as a reassurance, not only of Mary's virtue, but also of God's grand design coming to completion. Therefore, Joseph took Mary home as his wife (vv 24–25). For Joseph and

Mary, the sign of Immanuel was a sign of forgiveness and promise, because they believed God's promises. They believed the "sign." The little One was God among them.

The sign of Immanuel means what for you? We live in a time of fear and doubt. Two wars are going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our economy is in shambles, as people lose their homes and jobs. Many people have anxiety and fear, because they cling to false gods and idols of this world instead of fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. God sent Jesus to give us hope. Jesus says, "Do not be afraid" (Mt 28:10) and "Fear not" (Rev 1:17). Jesus gives us peace (Rom 1:7). Jesus saves us from our sins (Mt 1:21). All this God gives us by the sign of Immanuel. Jesus is God in human flesh, Immanuel, "God with us." And by coming in the flesh, God took your fears, your conflicts, your sins on himself. Then that flesh, God with us in the flesh, was killed (crucified on the cross) to take them all away. Still, Jesus is present with us in His Supper. The bad news: God is with us (Immanuel) in the Lord's Supper which can be a judgment for you if we do not believe that his body and blood is present. The Good News: God is with us (Immanuel) in the Lord's Supper as a means of grace in which God gives you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life if you believe "The

Lord's Words" that His body and blood is present. And that it is given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is with us forever (Mt 28:20; Jn 14:18). How do you see the sign, the birth of Christ? If you deny Christ and continue to reject His grace, like Ahaz, then it is a sign of judgment. But if you believe in Jesus Christ and His forgiveness that He has done for you, it is a sign of hope and forgiveness. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31)! This is the true peace, joy and comfort found in Christmas that you are forgiven and saved in Christ. For you who are "busy" with life hear this promise, it is for you. God has sent His Son for you. He has sent His Son for you to give you joy and peace once again from the "busy-ness" of life and the season. All this is made possible by God sending His Son to be born in a Manger in a small town known as Bethlehem. In believing God's promises, His Word, you will be with Jesus forever in heaven.

And may the peace of God, which is beyond all human comprehension, keep your hearts and minds through your faith in Christ Jesus. Amen