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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 26, 2021
Sunday after Christmas

Scripture Lessons: Hebrews 2:10-18, Luke 2:22-38

Hymns: 90; 98; 105:1-3,7-8; 97

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 7:10-14

¹⁰Moreover the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹“Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.”

¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!”

¹³Then he said, “Hear now, O house of David! *Is it* a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?

¹⁴Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God with us, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: What is Christmas all about? --

Did you have a good Christmas? Did you have a nice gathering of family and friends? Did you have a big dinner? Did you do something fun together? I know in our house Christmas Day usually includes some enjoyable family time. Every year there are going to be some card games or board games, and maybe a

Christmas themed movie. We might even go as a family to see a movie in the theatre. Did you have as good a Christmas as we did at our house?

Well, it all depends on what we think Christmas is all about doesn't it? We are blessed, very blessed indeed with material blessings. There were a great many Christmas gifts under the tree, and a lot of good food on the table both for meals and snacking. An old man's eyes surveyed his family before him and he thought, "The Lord has been very good to me."

But all that is peripheral, temporal, and material. It is not what Christmas is all about. What makes Christmas rich with its true blessings is all spiritual. That is where the Lord would focus our attention. Again and again our Advent and Christmas Scripture readings tell us about God-given signs. Zacharias was given a sign: he was mute for several months. Elizabeth was given a sign: the baby leaped for joy in her womb as Mary the mother of Jesus entered her house. The shepherds were given a sign, "*you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.*" (Luke 2:12) The wise men were given a sign: a star led them from the east to Bethlehem, the birthplace of the newborn King of the Jews.

One of the earliest signs we connect with Christmas is the sign mentioned in our text. It was given some six hundred years before Jesus was born, and yet this sign is one we cherish each and every year as we celebrate Christmas. It's --

THEME: Christmas! God's Sign Is Fulfilled!

In our text --

I. The Lord Gives an Authenticating Sign!

As we look at these different signs, we see how the Lord presents signs to individuals with varying attitudes toward His Word of promise. With Zacarias we see a devout man who struggled with doubt upon receiving an incredible promise from the Lord. With Elizabeth we see a woman of faith who was prompted by the Holy Spirit to a joyous confession of faith by the sign she received. The shepherds and wise men were joyous believers led by a sign so they could worship their Savior King.

What we see in our text is a quite different. The Prophet Isaiah was sent to meet King Ahaz of Judah to present a message of deliverance from Judah's enemies. Ahaz was not one of the good kings of Judah. Ahaz knew very well who God was and that he ought to serve the Lord, but he didn't much care to serve the Lord. He preferred to go his own way and handle the issues of life with his means and power, the way he wanted to handle them. One would think that Ahaz would have rejoiced with thanksgiving at the news that the Lord was going to deliver Judah from the hands of Israel and Syria, but Ahaz was almost dismissive of this good news.

That was when the Lord directed Isaiah to instruct Ahaz to ask for a sign, any sign that would satisfy Ahaz that this Word of God was true and reliable. At that point Ahaz took the next step in being downright disrespectful toward the Lord. Oh, he worded his response so it sounded polite, but even politely rejecting the Lord's offer to give one a sign is disrespectful, and offensive to the Lord.

We can see that Ahaz's response was offensive to the Lord in what Isaiah said on the Lord's behalf. *"Then he said, 'Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?'¹⁴ Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."* (Isaiah 7:13-14)

How great a sign was given by the Lord, a sign that would find its fulfillment in the birth of our Savior. It is a sign that we have all memorized, and that we cherish for the wonderful gospel truth it presents, -- or do we cherish this sign? This is the challenge our text presents before us this morning on this day after Christmas. Ahaz was dismissive of the Lord and the Lord's wondrous message of deliverance that was presented to him by the prophet Isaiah. **Dismissive!** Can you imagine being dismissive of such great and wonderful news? Can you imagine anyone ever disregarding the Lord's offer of a glorious sign of salvation, preferring instead the mundane things of this world, the things that people can do, the things that people invent, the things that occupy people's time, to pass the time, or to attempt to secure one's own future? Can you even imagine such a thing?

Well, I think you understand where I'm going with this. Ahaz knew who the Lord was, that He was the true God. Ahaz knew that Isaiah was a true prophet of God who was delivering the Lord's message of deliverance for God's people. Ahaz knew all that and found it all rather mundane, and so Ahaz was dismissive of the Lord's message, and of the Lord's sign.

Could we ever fall into such a trap? Millions of Americans already have. Millions of Americans have had the only true God presented to them a multitude of times and have heard from faithful messengers of the gospel the good news of our deliverance from our enemies, deliverance from sin, death, and the devil. The Lord has even given us a SIGN! And yet so many are simply dismissive of the word of the Lord and have allowed Christmas and actually the entire practice of their Christian faith to be preempted by the things of this world. On the side here: this takes me back many years to when I was a young pastor in eastern Wisconsin and had a conversation with a gentlemen that just happened in a clothing store in that city as we were both Christmas shopping. It was Christmas time, and we were talking about celebrating Jesus' birth. He challenged me with the question, "*You don't actually believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, do you?*" When I assured the man that indeed I did believe that, he laughed. He considered himself a Christian and attended a Christian church regularly, but he dismissed this sign of God as nothing more than poppycock invented by early Christians to avoid a scandal being attached to Jesus' name. Forty-five years ago that amazed me, stunned me that any church would hold such a position. Now forty-five years later this is the position of most Christian churches. Belief in the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus is considered optional at best, and silly and naïve at worst.

We are not above that. In fact, the Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians, (and so also us) that this is why the Spirit had all this recorded for us in the Bible, that we might be warned and not fall into the same foolishness as those who have gone before us. Paul wrote: "*Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*"¹² *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*" (1 Corinthians 10:11-12) So our text

speaks to us who are sitting here in church today. Be careful not to think, “if only so and so, and that other person would hear this sermon.” No, the Lord is warning us to be careful about our regard for His Word. If we think we are standing on solid spiritual ground, that is good, but take heed, lest you slip and fall, and become dismissive of this glorious message of deliverance that Lord has presented to us, especially in this incredible sign:

II. A Virgin Gives Birth to a Son!

Who ever heard of such a thing? This sign was a definite sign that called for the power of God, a sign that is beyond nature, far beyond what any natural human being would regard as normal. That anyone would believe that this would actually happen takes the power of the Spirit working faith in one’s heart, and the power of God the Holy Spirit working a miracle.

That is exactly what the angel told Mary. “*Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”* ³⁵ *And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”*

(Luke 1:34-35)

And with that word of the angel restating the words and promises of God, we have the heart of the gospel opened for us, that we all might wonder at these things, these marvelous things revealed to us, worked by God for our salvation.

We need to recall why this sign is so essential to our salvation. While some are still dismissive of the truth of these words, by faith we understand how critically important this act of God, the fulfillment of this specific sign is to our salvation.

Here’s the truth that matters, the truth that is upheld by all Scripture as we confess it in the Athanasian Creed: “*We believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and*

human flesh subsisting.” (Athanasian Creed) Jesus had to be true God **and** true Man be our Savior. Jesus had to be born of a virgin that He might be pure and undefiled by sin’s contamination at His birth. He had to be true God in order to be the all-atoning sacrifice that was needed to save all of mankind from eternal condemnation. He had to be true Man to die in our place.

God knew what was needed to deliver us from our enemies, and He provided that perfect Savior in Jesus who was born of the Virgin Mary as the Son of God and the Son of Man, was crucified for us and our salvation. He was buried and the third day rose again.

In our gospel lesson we were reminded of two faithful believers that had waited and watched for the redemption that God would send. Simeon and Anna took God at His word and regarded God’s words and promises as true and reliable. They rejoiced to see their salvation in the sign being fulfilled. By faith they understood that God is faithful and true to His every word and promise. And so, by the grace of God the Holy Spirit we have been brought to regard God’s words and promises as true and reliable. Rather than being dismissive of the sign that God revealed through the prophet, we have been brought to believe it and to find in its fulfillment our comfort, our joy of salvation, our assurance of deliverance from our enemies, and our eternal life.

So, yesterday was Christmas. **Did you have a good Christmas?** Absolutely! It’s Christmas and God’s sign has been fulfilled and His words and promises that He would deliver us from our enemies have been authenticated. The sign itself assures us that the Lord provided the One who alone makes all the difference between death and eternal life. God Himself provided the sign that the virgin would conceive and bear a Son, and that Son would be called Immanuel, which means **“God with us!” Hallelujah!** Praise the Lord!

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)