

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Text: Isaiah 7:1-14

¹When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it. ²Now the house of David was told, “Aram has allied itself with Ephraim”; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. ³Then the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman’s Field. ⁴Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. ⁵Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah’s son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶“Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.” ⁷Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “It will not take place, it will not happen, ⁸ for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. ⁹ The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah’s son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” ¹⁰Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹“Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.” ¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³Then 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? ¹⁴Therefore 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.



Theme: *The Sign of Immanuel*

As we look at the world today, we often are tempted to think that things look bleak for our Lord’s church and for us personally as Christians. We see the immorality of our day. We see how apathetic many Christians are toward their faith. We see how well many of the enemies of our Lord and His church seem to be doing, and it is tempting to lose heart.

It was also tempting for God’s people in the Old Testament to lose heart. There were many times when they were threatened by other nations that wanted to conquer them. God’s people were often falling into idolatry and the wicked practices of their neighbors. They often had kings that were unjust. In spite of all of these threat then and the threats today, God wants to give us hope. He gives us the sign of Immanuel. God is with us. When God is with us, who can be against us? God is with us. His name is Immanuel.

I. The historical context of this text.

This was written at the time after Israel had split into two nations. The 10 tribes of the north were still called Israel. The two tribes in the south were called Judah. Jerusalem was in the southern kingdom. The king of Judah was Ahaz, a descendant of King David. Ahaz was a very wicked king. He fell into many of the same sins that the Canaanites had committed. He even sacrificed one of his

own children to the god Molech. He also built many altars and shrines to false gods.

The greatest crisis of his reign occurs in our text. Israel, which was the northern kingdom, and the country of Aram struck a deal to conquer Judah. Their armies had already conquered most of Judah. Now they were at the walls of Jerusalem. Ahaz was looking for help. He was hoping to make an alliance with the king of Assyria. After all Assyria was the most powerful nation of that period. This was a scary time for Judah. It says, *“The hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.”*

God sent Isaiah to this wicked king to bring a message of hope. God said, *“Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood.’”* Isaiah went of to say that the head of these two nations was their king. Their strength was in man. They would soon fall. Isaiah ended by saying, *“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”*

Then He told Ahaz to ask for a sign whether in the deepest depths or the highest heights. Ahaz gives Isaiah an interesting answer. He says, *“I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”* God offered any sign, but the king gave a lot of false piety. The same man who sacrificed his son to a false god and who build altars to idols throughout the country now says, “I won’t test the Lord.” It was hypocrisy. So Isaiah tells him that the Lord Himself would give a sign, *“The Virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel,”* which means, God with us.

We see Ahaz’s hypocrisy because he didn’t trust in God. He tested the Lord again. He put his trust in the king of Assyria. He sent messengers to the king of Assyria, who said, *“I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel who are attacking me.”* (2 Kings 6:7) He took the silver and gold from the temple and from his treasury to pay the king of Assyria. Then he met the king of Assyria in Damascus and saw an altar which he liked. He sent the high priest a sketch of it. By the time that he returned, God’s altar was replaced by a new altar in the temple. The interesting thing was that Ahaz’s plan seemed to work in the short term. Assyria came to his help and defeated Aram, but his plan brought many long term problems to Judah. Later Assyria would also turn against Jerusalem.

II. The fulfillment of this prophecy.

Matthew is very clear on how this prophecy was fulfilled. He writes that the birth of Jesus took place to fulfill what Isaiah had prophesied, *“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means, ‘God with us.’”* Throughout the history of the church and even in the Jewish translation of the Old Testament into Greek, the word “virgin” was always used. This was always understood to be a miracle, that a woman who did not know a man would be with child.

It was fulfilled only when the Virgin Mary conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ahaz was a wicked king, but he was of the line of King David. God had promised David that one of his descendants would be the Messiah. Isaiah was telling him that he should not be looking to Assyria. He should put his hope in the one who would be his descendant. God in the flesh would be a

descendant of his. God was with Israel, and He would walk in Israel. That is where Ahaz's hope should be in the promise of the Messiah, not in what alliances he could make.

Ahaz's son's name was Hezekiah. He was a good and just king unlike his father. It says that he held fast to the Lord. (2 Kings 18) It was during his reign that the Assyrians destroyed the 10 northern tribes of Israel. Hezekiah broke the treaty that his father had made with Assyria and served them no longer. Then the Assyrians marched against Jerusalem. They were about to take the city when Hezekiah prayed. His prayer ended with these words, "Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand so that all kingdoms on earth may know that You alone, O Lord, are God." (2 Kings 18:19) That night the Angel of the Lord went out and killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Those who remained broke camp and returned home. God had saved His people. The Angel of the Lord who saved them was the pre-incarnate Christ. He is mentioned throughout the Old Testament and is always called "God."

God was with His people already in the Old Testament, but He especially came to be with His people when Jesus Christ took on our flesh. He was born to Mary, walked among His people, and accomplished our salvation.

III. How does this text apply to us today?

I talked a lot about things that happened thousands of years ago, but they are also good examples for us today. When we see the trials and threats around us, it is tempting to lose heart. It is even more tempting to put our trust in or make deals with ungodly things. God is telling us to put our trust in Him. Paul's words in Romans 8 are a commentary on this verse. "If God is for us, who can be against us." If God is with us, it means that He is for us. There is nothing that can separate us from His love. God loved you and me so much that He gave His own Son. We can live in confidence, peace, hope, and trust, even when it looks like we should have none of those things. God has given us the ultimate sign of His love. He has given us His own Son.

May He always give us trust in that love. God is with us. His name is Immanuel, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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A Very Snowy Sunday!