

A Sign from God
Isaiah 7:7-16
December 24, 2010
Christmas Eve

Some 700+ years before the birth of Christ there was a king in Judah by the name of Ahaz. Now Ahaz wasn't just a bad king, he was the worst. King Ahaz led the kingdom of Judah into worship of idols and false gods – even to the point of making a burnt offering sacrifice of his own son.

The rising power of Assyria was advancing on the kingdoms of Syria and Israel and they asked King Ahaz to join forces with them. When he refused, the two kingdoms turned on him. He should have turned to God for help, but he was enmeshed in the false gods of the world.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God sent a message to King Ahaz. The message was that God would be faithful to his covenant made with David, and that Syria and Israel would not be successful in their campaign against Judah. Listen to Isaiah 7:7-16. As you hear this passage, listen for God's patience and grace even when Ahaz makes the statement full of false humility that he will not test the Lord by asking for a sign. God is trying to give Ahaz another chance to turn to Him for help – to return his worship to the Lord alone and turn away from the other gods and idols.

But this is what the Sovereign Lord says:

"This invasion will never happen;

it will never take place;

for Syria is no stronger than its capital, Damascus,

and Damascus is no stronger than its king, Rezin.

As for Israel, within sixty-five years

it will be crushed and completely destroyed.

Israel is no stronger than its capital, Samaria,

and Samaria is no stronger than its king, Pekah son of Remaliah.

Unless your faith is firm,

I cannot make you stand firm."

Later, the Lord sent this message to King Ahaz: "Ask the Lord your God for a sign of confirmation, Ahaz. Make it as difficult as you want—as high as heaven or as deep as the place of the dead."

But the king refused. "No," he said, "I will not test the Lord like that."

Then Isaiah said, "Listen well, you royal family of David! Isn't it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you exhaust the patience of my God as well? All right then, the Lord himself will

give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us'). By the time this child is old enough to choose what is right and reject what is wrong, he will be eating yogurt and honey. For before the child is that old, the lands of the two kings you fear so much will both be deserted.

The birth of a child to a virgin was intended by God as a sign to the royal family of David. And as Christians, with the luxury of hindsight, we view it as a prophecy of the Savior Jesus.

We could make lots of theological points as a result of the virgin birth as it relates to Christ.

- We could say that perhaps being conceived outside the natural way enabled Jesus to be untouched by the problem of human sin. Thus as a sinless person Jesus could be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
- We could also say that the unique circumstances of Jesus' conception demonstrate the sheer power of God. The same God who created the entire universe from nothing has done a similar thing by creating a child without the presence of a human father to provide the seed.

However, the main point that I wish to be our focus on this holy night is that the virgin birth is a sign of God's care.

In the day of Isaiah, Judah had gotten herself into an international and spiritual situation that she did not seem to be able to get out of herself. The word of God through Isaiah was a word of hope – a word that God was going to care for his people, despite what they had done up to that point.

Tonight, I want you to hear those words of hope and care from God as being for you. Each of us comes to this place this evening having strayed from God to some extent. We have all sinned and have fallen short of where we should be. We're told that truth in the Bible. However, from the beginning of the Old Testament through the end of the New Testament we have the story of a God who loves his people and demonstrates grace and forgiveness to his people, despite the fact that they continually turn away from Him and place their trust in other false gods.

Tonight I want you to hear afresh and anew that the virgin has borne a child as a sign of God's care for you. You might think that you aren't worth saving, but God does. You might think that you have to clean up your act before God will receive you into His presence. But the truth is that He wants you just the way you are right now. If you will just humble yourself and believe in the Savior that He sent for you, He will do any cleaning up of you that needs to be done – but first he just wants to have His relationship with you restored.

That restoration can only happen through the death and resurrection of that person whose birth we celebrate tonight. Yes, *the virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')*.

Celebrate this wonderful miracle tonight as you give God praise for this sign of his caring for you.