

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 23, 2018**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 62, 86:1-2, 74, 78, 471:6.

Lessons: Isaiah 7:1-20, Hebrews 1:1-9, Matthew 1:18-25.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 7:14-15

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We have here one of the most obvious signs and prophecies of the birth of the Son of God, the Savior promised.

Wicked king Ahaz rejected what God had just told him. Just before our text we read: ***“Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ‘Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.’ But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.’”*** Isaiah 7:10-12 Then we read ***“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?’”*** Isaiah 7:13

Then Isaiah jumps to a marvelous prophecy, a prophecy of the one who will be God coming to dwell with his people. ***“Therefore 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.”***

When Ahaz ignored the Lord’s gracious promise to offer a miracle, God in effect answered, “you will get a sign, whether you want one or not.” But the sign God gave Ahaz was not a promise of help from the threat of the kings who were threatening him. Instead it was a sign of judgment for Ahaz and the sin-hardened nation of Judah. God himself would give the sign – the birth of a child – a very special child! Please pay attention as we hear again that

**GOD PROMISES TO SEND HIS SON AS SAVIOR**

- 1. The Messiah prophesied is to be born of a virgin.**
- 2. This will be the Son of God – “Immanuel” means “God With Us”.**

We believe that the Bible IS God speaking to us. We confess that the Bible IS the Very Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible is the history of God’s dealings with mankind and the very history of mankind. The Bible tells the facts and the truth about mankind, about sin, and salvation from sin. The Bible tells us about Jesus Christ, that he is “true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary.”

But not everyone believes that. Not everyone believes that Jesus is the Savior God promised. Not everyone believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Many critics of the Bible argue that the Hebrew word translated as “virgin” could mean young woman. But this is plainly, clearly, unmistakably to be a virgin, an unmarried woman who has never known a man, who would give birth to a baby. That is made clear by the words of the New Testament.

Our sermon text is one of those places where we must let Scripture interpret Scripture, and the New Testament – our Gospel lesson – unmistakably identifies Mary as a virgin. Matthew leaves no doubts about Mary being a virgin. He writes by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: ***“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.”*** Matthew 1:18 And a few verses later: ***“But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”*** Matthew 1:25

Following the simple principle of allowing Scripture to tell us what Scripture means, we must conclude that Isaiah foresaw Mary, a virgin, pregnant when no one expected Mary to be pregnant. Joseph knew he wasn't the father, and God settled his fears about Mary with an announcement from an angel.

Because man sinned, man must pay the penalties for sin. That penalty is death, temporal death and eternal death in hell. Scripture is plain about that: ***"the soul that sinneth, it shall die."*** Ezekiel 18:4 (KJV)

God himself would enter human history and life as a man through this miraculous birth. Isaiah calls the child ***"Immanuel"***, which means "God with us". No one else in the Old Testament has this name except this child. This name characterizes the person, the essence, and the work of the Messiah. The son of the virgin, conceived and born a true human being, yet without sin, is at the same time true, almighty, eternal God. It is the great mystery of godliness: God manifest in the flesh, the true Savior, Protector, and Helper of all men.

In what sense is God with us through this child? We understand that God is with us to protect us. But this child is God himself with us. God becomes flesh and blood and enters human history. And Isaiah sees it in advance and prophesies that this child is the God-man, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man born of the Virgin Mary. This is truly a miraculous sign. The one who came to be with us – he's the one who also promised to be with us even after he ascended into heaven: ***"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age,"*** Matthew 28:20, ***"unto the end of the world"*** as we read in the King James Version.

Our text begins with the word ***"therefore"***. The word in the original Hebrew is used to announce something of unusual importance and significance. The word suggests a vision or seeing something really important.

We can look at this sign from two opposite perspectives. First, believers have always treasured it as a promise of the Savior's coming. Isaiah trusted this promise as well as the other promises God gave him to proclaim. Some in Judah also treasured these promises in faith. But there is another perspective we must not forget. Wicked king Ahaz had rejected the Lord. For him and for the unbelieving Jews, this was a sign of future judgment, not mercy.

This sign did not guarantee deliverance from the invading kings. That had already been settled. This sign lies much further in the future. For Ahaz it was a sign of judgment.

But think also of what this sign meant for the house of Judah. By the time that this child is born, all the power and prestige of the royal house of David – a man of the house of Judah – would be gone. The greatest deliverance would not come from a powerful king or from Jewish princes and nobles. Deliverance would come from God through the miracle of birth – a virgin besides! What a disgrace for a proud and powerful Jewish king to be told that deliverance would come in this way.

Isaiah went on to describe the lifestyle of this child. ***"He will eat curds and honey"***, the food of poverty. Immanuel, God with us, will eat just like all other humans. He will live in poverty like many of God's people. Although this child was the son of David, God would send judgment upon the unbelief of the house of David by removing all its wealth, power, and prestige. The Messiah was born in a stable, not in a palace. The unbelief of God's people had squandered all the wealth God had given. The riches had either been paid as tribute to conquering armies or carried off as spoils of war.

The names of our Savior, Jesus, the Christ, also called Immanuel in our sermon text, were also very meaningful. Jesus means "savior". Immanuel means "God with us." That name denotes something that God's people were looking for for centuries. The Hebrew syllable "El" is one of the words used for God's name. It means "God", so a word with "El" usually has some reference to God.

Jesus, our Immanuel, spelled either with the first letter an "E" or an "I", is God who came down from heaven to be born of a woman, to become one of us, a true man. He did not abandon his person as true God. He humbled himself and set aside the use of his divine power and authority while he lived here on earth. Of course, we have some glimpses of Jesus' divine power in the miracles which he performed while on earth. It is that coming of Jesus to be "God with us" that we are planning to celebrate at Christmas.

For us who believe, this promise is a remarkable testimony to God's love and forgiveness. In the humblest of ways, the Savior would come to earth.

Our gospel lesson makes it plain that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. We also read from Luke: ***"The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."***

***So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.***” Luke 1:35 And in the more familiar Christmas history we read: ***“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.”*** Luke 2:4-5 You see that it is plain that Jesus was born of a virgin. Men have different ideas, but God’s Word, the Bible is clear.

Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ is a fundamental article of our faith. Denying this makes saving faith in Christ impossible. A true child of God finds it no harder to believe this miracle than to believe anything else God tells us in the Bible. If God in the beginning instituted natural conception through the union of husband and wife, the same almighty power enables Him to use other means. ***“For nothing is impossible with God.”*** Luke 1:37 If we do not believe this, but regard Jesus as the mere natural son of Joseph and Mary, or, as some even teach, as perhaps the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier, then we are forced by Holy Scripture to regard Jesus as having been born in sin like all the other sons of men ***“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”*** John 3:6 The Virgin Birth was God’s way of producing a holy child, who was also the Son of God and as a result of this, was able to fulfill the Law perfectly, to suffer our punishment, and then bring about everlasting atonement and reconciliation of the world to himself, as we read in 2 Corinthians 5:19 ***“that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.”*** Our Savior was God and man in one person. That fact makes our redemption certain.

We confess it and rejoice in it. That is the way that we are saved: God’s only-begotten son came to earth to earn salvation, to give redemption to us, as God clearly tells us: ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*** John 3:16-17

In the Advent season we are again preparing for that time, that joyous time of which Saint Paul writes in Galatians 4:4-7: ***“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”***

Because Jesus came from his heavenly Father to redeem us, we shall inherit eternal life, believing that he was truly born of a virgin. ***“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”*** Isaiah 7:14 He is Immanuel. That means, God With Us! Amen.

(Adapted from Ministry By Mail for December 4, 2011)