

Sermon Bumper

Isaiah 7:1-14

When 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.

² Now the house of David was told, “Aram has allied itself with^[a] Ephraim”; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.

³ Then the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub,^[b] to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer’s Field. ⁴ Say 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. ⁵ Aram, 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.” ⁷ Yet 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.”

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you^[c] a sign: The virgin^[d] will conceive and give birth to a son, and^[e] will call him Immanuel.^[f]

Have you ever asked God for a sign? Show me God which college I should go to? God show which job I should take? Who should I marry? I remember when I was in college I went to one of my friend's homes in MN for the weekend. Lynn, his cousin, caught my eye. And we ended up doing a lot of things together that weekend. And so being a college guy who looked forward to getting married: I prayed, God, I want to marry a girl named Lynn. It doesn't have to be this Lynn but she is right here and this would seem awfully convenient for you and well, of course, for me. You on it God? Good go!

Lynn and I never dated. But that prayer stuck with me through college and Seminary. It was just kind of one of those signs for me. So, of course, God being God, who is not only super, over the top gracious, but He also has a fantastic sense of humor, places this wonderful girl in my life named Jacky. And many of you know that is who I married. (shrug shoulders). But maybe what you don't know is Jacky's middle name is Lyn. Just saying is God great. I think many of us have asked God for signs before. My fear is that God has been showing us signs all along and we have missed them. This is one of my favorite signs: **If you are looking for sign from God, this is it!**

Today as we continue our series Light in the Darkness God, let's go into the Old Testament book of Isaiah and see **What is God giving you this Christmas?**

Isaiah 7:10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹“Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.” What an opportunity! This is a Christmas Wish list that has no bounds. Ask for whatever you want, nothing is too big, nothing is too small. You name it and it is yours. Carte Blanche. Booyah!

There is a back story which makes the promise of God to ask for whatever you wish for sign super important. Ahaz is the king of a country called Judah. And he is in danger of losing his rule and his kingdom. Two armies are about to attack him. Isaiah 7:2 tells us about it. ² **Now the house of David was told, “Aram has allied itself with^[a] Ephraim”; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.** They were literally shaking in their sandals. And God has a message of Ahaz: **‘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.** ⁵ **Aram, 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.”** ⁷ **Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “It will not take place, it will not happen,** But God's promise also comes with a warning: Isaiah 7:9 **If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”**

King Ahaz and the people of Judah, were in desperate need of a sign from the Lord, some kind of proof that God was with them in a time of crisis. And it is at this point where God says, ask for whatever sign you want, I love you so much, ask for whatever sign you want and I will give it to you. This sign would serve as a pledge, or guarantee. You are going to be ok. God says I am with you and going to take care of you.

Stunningly this is how Ahaz responds to God's promise of ask for whatever sign you want, nothing is too big or too small, just ask: **I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”** What? Are you kidding me? Here is why, So Ahaz is faking piety. Ahaz doesn't ask for a sign because he has already made his mind up what he is going to do. He is not going to rely on God for the rescue. He is going to bribe the top military power of the world at that time with the temple funds and ally himself with the country called Assyria. I want you to picture this setting this way: Ahaz is like a mouse. And he is going to ally himself

with Assyria who is like a cat. This is like a mouse going to a cat and saying “I need your help. There are two big rats that are bothering me.” What could go wrong?! The cat is pleased to take care of the rats but the cat will also, of course, take care of the mouse too.

But God in his mercy comes to Ahaz and says even though you won’t ask for a sign, I will give you and your descendants a sign there is deeper than the depths and higher than the highest height. God chooses a sign no human would think of, an unmistakable sign. And remarkably, the sign God gives is one that would reach centuries beyond the immediate context. In fact, this sign continues to assure us of God’s care and presence for all time and beyond. Here is the sign. Isaiah 7:13,14 **Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you ^[c] a sign: The virgin ^[d] will conceive and give birth to a son,**

What is God going to give you this Christmas? A. A sign – the sign of a virgin birth.

The virgin birth is an unmistakable sign. Who ever heard of a virgin birth? Now understand that the Hebrew word here is not the typical Hebrew word for virgin but it is the word for a young woman. But do consider this, the word used here is the same word used five other times in the Old Testament, always referring to a young unmarried woman who is still in the state of virginity. The word doesn’t mean virgin but implies virginity. And in the Jewish translation of the Old Testament into Greek, written at least 200 BC, translates this word as virgin. In the New Testament the angel Gabriel tells Joseph, what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. A normal birth does not count as a sign – that has happened billions of times.

Here is why all of that is important. The virgin birth tells us that Mary will be the mother but that Joseph will not be biological father. The baby was conceived of the Holy Spirit so he is a man but also God incarnate. The virgin birth is the sign. The child born is 100% God and 100% man. Without the virgin birth, the child will be just a good man who can’t forgive sins or give us eternal life.

We like King Ahaz have enemies that threaten us and shake us to the core like those big trees in the forest swaying in the wind. Perhaps what shakes you is the feeling of being unseen. Whether through memories of middle school and high school, or at work, or maybe even in your marriage you feel overlooked and under appreciated. It seems that what you do doesn’t matter, nobody notices. Whatever it was or is, your mind races with insecurities in the darkness of the unseen.

Or maybe you are going through a time of fear. You think you have it all under control until you start with a cough and then you get the cancer diagnosis. You think you have it all under control until you are notified of layoffs. You think it is all under control and then the school calls. You think you have it all under control and then the check engine light comes on. And the weight of being overwhelmed darkness your heart and mind.

And then of course, for all of us, we know that we have sinned time and time again. The temptations come and go. Sometimes it is not issue, sometimes is really difficult, and sometimes we fall and do something we know is wrong. Our sin also threatens to darken our day and our future and our eternity. Some us worry did my sin put me on the outside of God’s love, outside of his grace.

What is God going to give you this Christmas? A. A sign – the sign of a virgin birth. B. The gift of God with us!

It is here that we need to remember the sign and open the gift. Isaiah 7:14 **Therefore the Lord himself will give you^[c] a sign: The virgin^[d] will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel.** The sign is the guarantee, the gift is the baby Jesus, 100% God and 100% man. The Gift that loves us and forgives us. Jesus, God with us, is the Light. Jesus is calling you and me out of the darkness of our sin and the sin of others. He is calling us out of the darkness of death and Satan. The Light that we have in the darkness is Immanuel, God is with us. You may not always see the Light but the Light always sees you. Jesus is the light and he is calling you to come out of the darkness of hiding into his Light.

Psychiatrist John Rosen was known for his work with people with schizophrenia. Instead of staying away from his patients, he moved into the ward with them. His bed was by their beds. He lived the life they lived. He loved them. If they didn't talk, he didn't either. He was communicating love to them. He put his arms around them and hugged them and loved them back to life. Often the first words they spoke were "thank you." This is what Jesus did for us at Christmas. He moved in with us. His bed is among ours. He hugs us, loves us, and leads us into the Light of God's love. God is with us in the darkness of our unseen times, in the darkness of our devastating circumstances, in the darkness of our sin. And He is the light that brings God protection, love, and forgiveness into our lives. God with us.

God with us doesn't stop at the manger. God with us takes on human flesh ultimately so he could not only walk with us through every trial, temptation, trouble, break up, grief but also so he could fight all of our battles and bring us victory by going to a wooden cross and suffers the punishment that we rightfully deserve and die. 2 Corinthians 5:21 **God made him who had no sin to be sin^[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** And so the gift of God is not only God with us but God who suffers instead of us.

King Ahaz lived like he was in charge of his future, like God wasn't big enough or close enough to deal with the problems he was facing. But you don't have to do this. Because you know that God is with you and is for you. He gave you a sign and sent you a gift. So . . . how is your life going to look different because the Light of God is with you (or how can God's Light change your life?)