

Third Midweek Advent Service – December 20, 2006
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

THIS IS AN AWESOME SIGN Isaiah 7:14

Would you like a special sign or miracle? Would you like God to give you a sign? Often you will hear people say, "If only God would give me a sign to show me what I should do." Or "If only God would give me a sign so that I would know that what I am doing is the right thing." In our reading for today we have God offering the King of Judah, King Ahaz, a sign. Ahaz was facing difficult times. The King of Israel and the King of Syria were waging war against Judah. Ahaz had lost 120,000 soldiers who had been killed and 200,000 soldiers had been taken captive. He was afraid that he would lose his throne and his kingdom. He had already contacted the King of Assyria and had sent him much of the gold from the temple of God to make an alliance with him so that he would come and aid Ahaz against Israel and Syria. God had promised Ahaz, since he was a descendant of King David that one of David's descendants would always sit on the throne of Judah. However, Ahaz did not trust the promises of God. He had built altars to false gods in Jerusalem. He had even sacrificed some of his own children to these idols. So when God sent the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz and told him not to be afraid because the Lord would protect him, Ahaz did not put much stock in Isaiah's word from the Lord. He did not believe in the Lord God. So when Isaiah said ask for a sign, Ahaz responded, "I don't want any sign. I don't want to put God to the test." It is then that God had Isaiah speak the words of the prophecy before us today. Isaiah said, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son and she will call him Immanuel." (Is. 7:14) As we ponder the words of this prophecy, we will have to say **THIS IS AN AWESOME SIGN. I) A virgin and a child. II) A name – Immanuel.**

A VIRGIN AND A CHILD

"Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son." (v. 14a) What is so unusual about a virgin conceiving and bearing a child? Virgins don't have children. We all know for a woman to have a child, she normally has to have sexual relations with a man. But in this case there is no man involved in the birth of this child. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the prophet is foretelling the virgin birth. This is in keeping with the first promise ever made to the human race about a Savior and rescuer. Remember when God confronted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he said to the devil, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15) God refers to the seed of the woman not the seed of a man. Throughout the Old Testament, we read of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. A man is always mentioned because of the male sperm. However, when it comes to the promised Savior we read first of the seed of the woman in Genesis 3. Now 700 years before the birth of the Messiah, we hear again that this will be a virgin birth. No man is involved in the conception of this child. Two thousand years ago we are told by the evangelist Matthew the problems and turmoil that this virgin birth brought to a young couple who were engaged to be married. A young teenage girl has been engaged to a young carpenter probably in his early 20's. One day a messenger from God comes to the girl and tells her that she is going to have a child. She asks the angel how this can be since she is a virgin and has had no relations with a man. The angel tells her, "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) One of the amazing things about this miracle is that Mary believed it. When the angel Gabriel explained this to her, she responded, "May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38b)

This pregnancy however caused some problems for Mary's fiancé, Joseph. When he learned that his wife to be was pregnant he was naturally hurt and upset. He assumed that Mary had been unfaithful to him and had relations with another man. Now what was Joseph to do? He was faced with three options. He could publicly accuse Mary of adultery and have her stoned to death according to the Law of Moses. He could privately divorce Mary and end their engagement and allow her to leave Nazareth and go some place else to have her child so she wouldn't be publicly disgraced and scorned. Or he could take Mary as his wife and have everyone

assume that this was his child and that he and Mary had premarital relations. Joseph decided to divorce Mary quietly, send her away from Nazareth and then go on with his life. After he had made that decision, an angel appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20b-21) Matthew then makes this observation and comment, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet, ‘The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel, which means God with us.’” (Matthew 1:22-23) Matthew rightly sees this birth as the sign that God had promised through Isaiah seven hundred years before.

Mary is the virgin and Jesus is the child, the son. This had never happened before in the history of the human race and it will never happen again. This is an awesome sign. But there’s more.

A NAME – IMMANUEL

The name given to this child speaks volumes about who he is. He is to be called “Immanuel”. That is Hebrew for “God with us.” Companies spend thousands of dollars to find just the right name for a new product so that it will attract people’s attention and get them to buy what they are offering. When companies merge or someone starts a new business they spend a lot of time and effort selecting just the right name to describe their business and to attract customers. The name that God gave to the virgin’s son tells us exactly who this child is. This is God. He is God with us. God left his throne in glory and came to this earth to become one of us. God took on human flesh and bones to live among us. This is not some great human being. This is not some wonderful prophet. This is the mighty God.

Why would God come to this earth and become one of us? He did that to take our place and be our substitute. God has decreed that we must be holy as he is holy. We are to be perfect if we expect to live with him forever. Unfortunately, none of us can claim to be perfect. We enter this world with three strikes against us and no matter how hard we work and try we can’t be perfect. Immanuel however was and is perfect. He lived the holy life that God demands of us. He did it for you and me and all the people of this world. God had also decreed that if we were not perfect, we would have to suffer the punishment of our sins, eternal separation from our loving and just Creator in the fires of hell. Well, Immanuel suffered that separation for us. He endured the anger and wrath of God for us. He was our perfect substitute, our perfect sacrifice because of who he is. He is our holy God.

After he defeated the devil for us and conquered death by rising from the grave, the God-Man returned to his throne in glory, but he did not leave us alone. He promised us, “And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b) The God-Man, Immanuel is still with you and me everyday of our life. Isn’t this comforting? You and I never walk alone. Immanuel is always with us. He is always directing, guiding and helping us. He is there to protect and provide for us. He is there winning for us pardon, forgiveness and peace.

What an awesome sign. A virgin bears a son. That son is God with us. He is with us always to the end of time.

Amen.