

IN NOMINE JESU

A SIGN

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

Therefore, Adonai Himself will give to you (a) sign: behold the Virgin is pregnant and bearing (a) Son, and she will call His Name, "God with us."¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Merry Christmas! How glibly those words seem to roll off the tongue – only to be replaced in our society by the innocuous “Happy Holidays!” People in congregations who claim Christ, desire to fight back when faced with the rise of worldisms such as paganism, humanism, secularism, atheism, agnosticism. They coin phrases such as “Keep Christ in Christmas,” remember the “Reason for the Season.” All the while, these well meaning Christians begin humming Christmas Carols on October 31, and plan to put away their household decorations on the 26th of December. (The Christmas is, after all, twelve days long, from this holy night until the Epiphany, January 6)!

From bumper-stickers to Facebook causes, those who would be Christian desire to shove back the world-creep upon Christmas. All the while, because they are impacted by our society, some Christians miss the Christ-Mass, (The Lord coming to serve His people and their joyful response). And, they miss the reasons the Christ-mass remains important in the Church. That is, in the Christ, the God become one with us in the flesh, the mystery of the ages is revealed. He speaks in our ears, He touches us in our mouths, He grants us repentance, forgiveness, life and salvation.

To drive the reasons for the Christ-mass into your ears - and from there into your minds and hearts - hear the declaration of the Word of God that tells of the Reason for the Season, and why Christ **is** in Christmas:

Therefore, Adonai Himself will give to you (a) sign: behold the Virgin is pregnant and bearing (a) Son, and she will call His Name, "God with us...and you will call His Name, Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."²

What is the Reason for the season?

God declares that the Son of the Virgin will save His people from their sins.

Why is Christ in Christmas?

God proclaims that His coming into our flesh means that the fruits of His life and death come to His people. His sacrifice of the Mass, done only one time, on the cross - is God's means of forgiveness, life and salvation - and it is communicated to His people through the means He chose. Biblically speaking, rightly understood, Christians, and Christians alone, cannot have the Mass - God's Service - without the Christ.

How many times have the people of God looked to powers other than God to deliver them? Those times are surely beyond our numbering. Even when those people were united as a nation truly designed to be under God - the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah - even then they looked to others for their salvation.

That is the situation which was a reality when the prophet of today's readings, Isaiah, approached King Ahaz. That evil man, reflecting and adding to the evil of his people, had turned to worldly powers in the hope of preserving their lands. He

¹ Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:21b.

who was born of the line of God's favored King, David, had not followed the faith of his father (Does this sting a bit as we reflect about our family members who have put their hope and trust in things, people and powers other than that of God and His Christ)? King Ahaz had left the faith, but God, Who is ever faithful, still called him to repentance that he, and his people, might be saved. He says,

Again YHWH caused (a) Word to Ahaz, saying, "Ask (a) sign for yourself of YHWH your Elohe: cause it to be deep as Sheol or cause it to be high as heaven."³

In the midst of his, and his people's sins, God comes and offers forgiveness and repentance. That is the point – to call this evil king of King David's line to turn from sin, and to trust in God, walking in new life. We know this because the prophet says to him, "for yourself of I AM, your God." He does not say, "the God of your people," or, "the God of Creation," but, "your God." By such use, the prophet, who is speaking God's holy Word, reminds Ahaz that God is still his God, the One who would lead him, forgive him, and save him from his enemies on earth, and in the spiritual realms.

Faced with such an offer in the midst of your sins, what would you do? Would you hear the mercy and grace being offered in the phrase "your God," repent and turn to new life? You would in Christ, because you know that He was the Promise who came into our flesh to save you from sin, and all the powers that would overthrow you.

But, if you are unrepentant of your sins, and your sinful condition, you might respond as did evil king Ahaz. That is, those who are unrepentant and yet know the

² *Isaiah* 7:14

³ *Isaiah* 7:10-11

word of God, do as their father, Satan, did to our first parents. That is, you, he, they, take the Word of God and use it out of context to respond to God's gracious offer of forgiveness, life and salvation. King Ahaz follows the pattern just described, when he responds to the grace-filled invitation: *Ask (a) sign for yourself of YHWH your Elohe...*

Then Ahaz said, "Not I will ask and not I will test the YHWH."⁴

He quotes scripture, the Lord's Word in Deuteronomy, and rejects God's offer of grace and mercy. What Ahaz says is true – it is the inspired command of God. But, in this context, it is a rejection of God's grace. What should God do? What would you do if someone offered your gracious offers of forgiveness, despising them by twisting your words to mean other than you intended?

God, through Isaiah, responds (and displays that the prophet's word, from the prophetic office is none other than God's Word, and vice versa):

Then he says, "Hear then, O house of David: is it too little for you to weary men? But will you weary the Elohe!"⁵

God, through Isaiah, shows His frustration. Yet, God is not a fallen superman. God speaks of this misuse of His Word as causing trial to Him, wearing Him with scripture divorced from context. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the Living God. Yet, that same God's first impulse is to continue to try to win back His sinning creatures, as our text continues:

Therefore, Adonai Himself will give to you (a) sign: behold the Virgin is pregnant and bearing (a) Son, and she will call His Name, "God with us."⁶

⁴ *Isaiah 7:12*

⁵ *Isaiah 7:13*

⁶ *Isaiah 7:14*

Though Ahaz continued to reject the offer, and the Sign, God's Word stood firm. His greater son, Hezekiah, would be born and return the kingly line of David, for a while to the right confession and life in the Word of God. But, that line, due to Ahaz and other king's sins would fall into dishonor, and then into poverty, and wretchedness. The Mystery of the Old Testament is given in the promise of the prophet Isaiah to a king of the line of David who had not, and would not, follow the Faith of David.

It would continue in such a manner, until, by God's grace, a young maiden, a girl really, would come into her time of child-bearing. She who, through no merit of her own, bore in her veins the kingly blood of David, would receive the fulfillment of the Promise given to king Ahaz, which he, but not she, rejected. In one unwed mother, in the fullness of God's time, God fulfilled His promise:

*Adonai Himself will give to you (a) sign: behold the Virgin is pregnant and bearing (a) Son, and she will call His Name, "God with us."*⁷

Immanuel, "God with Us," is the reason for this season, the Christ in Christmas, and the reason we declare to one another "Merry Christmas!" The Word of God - beholding our lostness and separation from His glory, holiness and purity - took on our flesh with all humility, to be born as a male child of a girl whose body was pure and undefiled. Think about this: Merry Christmas means that there is a Mary in Christmas.

The promise given to the apostate king Ahaz of the Old Covenant is fulfilled in the faithful, poor, humble, betrothed but as yet unmarried, daughter of a many-great-grandson of King David. The Mystery of the Old Testament once given in the promise of the prophet Isaiah to a king of the line of David who had not, and would not, follow the Faith of David is revealed. This mystery, declared in the words repeated today - veiled for the hard of heart - the truth that God would, from the fallen seed of David, raise up for him a Son, his greatest Son. He, unlike even the great King David, beloved of the Lord, would be conceived and born without sin, of a Virgin without disturbing her virginity! Why? That He might take our sins upon His sinless flesh. He did so to save the people, including some, the faithful, from the line of fallen king Ahaz, from their sins! That is why these two passages were put together earlier in your hearing:

Therefore, Adonai Himself will give to you (a) sign: behold the Virgin is pregnant and bearing (a) Son, and she will call His Name, "God with us...and you will call His Name, Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."⁸

Tonight, on this holy night, the Savior promised to the unrepentant King Ahaz is again revealed. The Old Testament prophecy and its New Testament fulfillment are proclaimed together. Grace - that unmerited favor with God that He wants so to give to sinners - grace had dawned in the world. The Son of God, in Whom His sacrificial, unconditional love for humans, was born of a Virgin, without disturbing her virginity, and entered His fallen creation.

⁷ Isaiah 7:14

⁸ Isaiah 7:14

He who was wrapped on that most significant nights in the swaddling cloths of a human child, would be have His limbs wrapped in the swaddling cloths of the grave. He who passed through the Virgin womb would then pass through the virgin tomb. He who lived as man while remaining fully divine, would as fully divine raise from death as fully Man. He who was once likely laid in a stone manger trough, who would have no earthly house of His own, would one day rise from the earth in our flesh, and seat it at the highest position of power and majesty in the universe. In Him, you will also rise! For you have received Him by His grace, through His faith, unto life everlasting! God Himself has given you the sign. He has made it true in time. He makes it true in you. Merry Christmas!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Eve of the Nativity (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Isaiah 7:10-14; I John 4:7-16; Matthew 1:18-25

December 24, 2008

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT:

Again YHWH caused (a) Word to Ahaz, saying, "Ask (a) sign for yourself of YHWH your Elohe: cause it to be deep as Sheol or cause it to be high as heaven."⁹

Then Ahaz said, "Not I will ask and not I will test the YHWH."¹⁰

Then he says, "Hear then, O house of David: is it too little for you to weary men? But will you weary the Elohe!"¹¹

Therefore, Adonai Himself will give to you (a) sign: behold the Virgin is pregnant and bearing (a) Son, and she will call His Name, "God with us."¹²

⁹ *Isaiah 7:10-11*

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¹¹ *Isaiah 7:13*

¹² *Isaiah 7:14*