

December 23, 2007
Advent 4

"The Virgin Birth and Its Impact on Faith"

ISAIAH 7:10-14

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 men? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ 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.

This is really amazing, something simple, yet so amazing. If I take a piece of ice and drop it into a glass of water it floats to the top. Ordinarily this should not happen. As liquid goes to a solid form it decreases in size and density. The solid water we call ice should actually get smaller and sink to the bottom of the glass. Instead it expands when it freezes and floats to the top of the water. The hand of God has created a unique property for water that allows ice to float on the surface. This has tremendous implications for lakes in the winter to keep them from freezing solid. This layer of floating ice protects plants and fish in the water from the severe cold.

Here is something far more amazing. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem he was born from a virgin named Mary. She conceived her child not from the seed of a man but through the power of the Holy Spirit. It was the hand of God that reached down into our world and performed an amazing miracle. This miracle has tremendous implications for the Christian faith.

In 2004 *Newsweek* magazine reported that 79% of American adults believe in the Virgin Birth with 67% believing the story of Jesus birth the manger in Bethlehem, the shepherds, and the wise men is literally true. It seems that even if people say they believe in the Virgin Birth, it does not have much impact in their lives. This morning we want to use this great prophecy from Isaiah about a virgin conceiving a child to see the far reaching impact has on faith, especially our faith

The challenge it offers

The Virgin Birth of our Lord Jesus presents a serious challenge to any person who comes in contact with the Bible. It is like a large rock, a huge rock that either becomes part of your faith or it is a rock that crushes you. Before us this morning we have the example of a king named Ahaz who did not want to put his trust in the Lord in miracles of the Lord to rescue his people. You might think of him as someone living today who flatly refuses to believe the hand of God created water to turn into ice or the hand of God in the miracle of the Virgin Birth of our Lord Jesus. What does the Lord do for this stubborn king? He speaks to him through Isaiah and says, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

Things were going badly for Ahaz and the people in Jerusalem. The northern tribe of

Ephraim and the country of Syria had united together and threatened to invade Judah and Jerusalem and tear them apart. Through Isaiah the Lord told Ahaz, "Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of fire wood." Instead of being a powerful firestorm sweeping down from the north to destroy them, the Lord promised to reduce their power to nothing and make them two smoldering sticks in the fire. Ahaz could just relax and let the Lord perform a mighty miracle as the Lord had done in the past. Instead he stubbornly resists any effort the Lord makes to help them.

The Lord pleaded with Ahaz to request a sign as living proof that a mighty deliverance was coming from the hand of the Lord. The sign could be anything from the deepest depths to the highest heights. Ahaz could have said, "Lord, show me you are real and you will help us by stopping this rock in midair when I drop it to the ground." He could have asked the sun to stop shining for a few minutes. The Lord would have given him the proof or sign needed to believe the Lord's promise.

Ahaz stubbornly refused a sign from the Lord. He wanted to take matters in his own hands and use all the gold in the temple of Jerusalem to buy protection from the Assyrians rather than leaning on the name of the Lord. The Lord was willing to give him free help and he refused it, covering up his rejection of the Lord with the pious platitude, "I will not put the Lord to the test." When the Lord offers us free help he expects us to take it especially when he gives us the gift of his Son Jesus to be our Savior.

Did you hear about the family that got lost in Northern California while looking for a Christmas tree? It started to snow and they huddled together in a culvert protected by branches. Finally a CHP helicopter noticed their help sign in the snow. How foolishly it would have been for them to tell the rescuers, we don't need your helicopter. We can make it our own. That was King Ahaz. That is how many people view the birth of Jesus today and even the Virgin Birth. It is a great story, it is probably true, but I really don't need it in my life. I can make it on my own. I am a decent person and if the Lord returns I think he will reward me for trying my best to be a good person. How many people do you know who are living their lives like this?

Before we take too many jabs at other people this morning, we need to ask if there isn't a little bit of Ahaz in all of us at different times. We have the power of prayer that we can access every day for every task of life. Do we always take seriously the Lord's powerful promise given in the psalms, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you and you will glory me." The Lord told Ahaz and anyone who dares to read these words of the Bible, "Hear now, you house of David! It is not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?" It is foolish to resist help from other people when we need it but even more foolish to resist the help of God when he offers it to us as a free gift. It is part of our sinful nature to want to make it on our own without too much of God in our lives. Romans 8 says that the mind of the natural man is hostile to God. We confessed our sins this morning. This includes the many times we have not taken full advantage of seeking the Lord's help in prayer, or the times we fail to seek the Lord's blessing that comes with being in his Word and having him speak to us.

Do you ever wish the Lord would give you a sign, some kind of yes or no on what you should do with decisions in your future the way he gave a sign to Moses? Remember how Moses took his stick and threw it to the ground and it became a snake. Remember the

wet and dry fleece that guided Gideon? Wouldn't it be great if he gave you a GPS system that could tell you what to do next? That's what the Lord was offering Ahaz. When he rejected the offer, the Lord gave him a sign he could not miss, a sign meant for all the world, like a thousand flashing neon lights. He gave them the ultimate sign of his power and deliverance, the Virgin Birth of a child, named Emmanuel.

The comfort it brings

"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 Emmanuel." There is an old saying in the newspaper business that if a dog bites a man that is not news, but if a man bites a dog that makes the news. If a young woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby, that is certainly good news but it does not make the headlines, it is not what we call a sign, an extraordinary miracle of God that gets our attention. However, if a the virgin gives birth to a child and that child is Lord and God from all eternity, that is amazing news, good news, that not only challenges our whole belief system, but also brings us tremendous peace and comfort.

How sad Joseph was before he became convinced by an angel of the Lord that Mary, his beloved Mary whom he thought was a virgin, was pregnant by the Holy Spirit? He had it in his mind to divorce her quietly. He operated on the assumption that the baby growing in her womb was conceived by her relations with another man. He was even more perturbed and distressed by her account of an angel appearing to her and telling her she would conceive by the Holy Spirit.

If we only go by what we see in our natural world as Joseph did, then we will miss the mighty miracle of Jesus birth and the glory of the Christian faith. It happens every day that women conceive when two cells unite together and babies grow in the womb and are born into this world. The third president of our country Thomas Jefferson cut out the parts of the New Testament gospels he did not like and made no sense to his intellectual mind. He wrote of the Virgin Birth, "The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus by the Supreme Being as his father in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter." Larry King was once asked whom he would interview if he had the opportunity to pick any person from history. Without even thinking he responded by saying, "I would ask for an interview with Jesus and ask him the question, 'Were you really born of Virgin?'" It is the question of the ages that has challenged some people, but brought great comfort to those who believe it is true.

The angel appeared to Joseph and say, "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 of Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Imagine the peace and comfort that comes with knowing that what Mary said about her conception and even the name for the child was true. Imagine the peace and comfort of tying this in with what was prophesied long ago by the prophet Isaiah. His whole world view suddenly changed, especially his relationship with Mary.

Dear Christian, think of how your life has changed because of these words in the Bible of the Virgin Birth. Just as a baby grows in the womb of a mother and becomes part of her life, so this teaching has grown and becomes part of your life, your faith, your whole

world view. You sing about it in the great carols of Christmas. The mighty hand of God that created our world including water and ice is the hand of a God who has his son born into the world as a tiny baby conceived by the Holy Spirit. This miracle child was not tainted with sin as we were when we were born. His pure life and pure death are the source of the payment for all our sin. "Nail, spear, will pierce him through, the cross he'll bear for me for you." I really appreciated the article in the *Forward In Christ* magazine for December. A classmate of mine, Pastor Carl Henkel, talked about witnessing to a young woman while giving blood. She became so enthralled by the conversation she forgot to take sample. The blood he gave had to be rejected because there was no sample to prove it was reliable and safe. The Virgin Birth of Jesus assures us this morning, that the blood of Jesus is so pure it cleanses us from all sin, even the many times we have not appreciated the mighty miracles of our God as much as we should. Amen.