

December 22, 2013
Advent 4

"The Virgin Birth and Its Impact on Your Life"

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.

I am holding in my hand a little green book of sermons with the title, "The Christ of Christmas." The author James Boice tells how he once preached a series of sermons on the virgin birth during the Advent season. A visitor came to him after the worship service and told him how much he appreciated the message on the virgin birth. Then he said, "I have never heard a message on the virgin birth. Why do you suppose that is?"

We can certainly understand why pastors who don't believe in the miracles of the Bible would avoid preaching on the virgin birth. But there might be another reason for not hearing many sermons on the virgin birth. On the surface it might appear to some that it is not very relevant to our personal lives. About ten years ago Newsweek magazine conducted a survey in which they asked people about their beliefs about Jesus and his birth. 79% said they believed Jesus was born of a virgin and 67% believed he was born in stable in Bethlehem and had a manger for his crib. It seems that even if people confess to believe in the virgin birth, it does not have much of an impact on their lives. This morning we want to have you look more closely at these words from Isaiah the prophet that predicted a virgin would conceive a son and call him Immanuel. As we shall see this is not just some insignificant miracle. The virgin birth has a huge impact on our lives.

What a challenge it offers

The virgin birth challenges us to believe in something much larger than the world in which we live. It challenges us to believe in miracles. "Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 'Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.'" The Lord told this wicked king of Judah named Ahaz that he would perform a miraculous deliverance for their enemies. The king of Syria and the king of the northern tribes of Israel had united to invade Judah and attack Jerusalem. The Lord told this wicked king that these two nations would be reduced to smoldering stumps of firewood. The Lord certainly had the power to perform such a miracle. Psalm 46 says "He breaks the bow and shatters the spear and burns the shields in the fire."

Ahaz stubbornly refuses to believe that the Lord was going to help them. He makes his own plans to save his nation. So the Lord tells this wicked king who sacrificed his own children to heathen gods, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign." He could have asked for any sign he wanted from the deepest depths to the highest heights. He could have taken a stone such as this and say, "If the Lord is telling me the truth, then let me drop this stone

and have it stay suspended in mid air and not fall to the ground.” The Lord would have granted him the sign to turn his heart around and believe the word of the Lord.

How did Ahaz respond to this great opportunity to be brought back to the Lord? He said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.” He appears to be ever so humble and so pious and so religious when he says, “I won’t put the Lord to the test.” He is actually being very defiant as he turns down this golden opportunity for the Lord to give him a sign. Remember how Gideon placed a piece of fleece on the ground and asked the Lord to let ground be dry and the fleece wet. The next morning the ground was totally dry. There was no dew, but the fleece was so wet he was able to wring out a whole bowlful of water. Ahaz did not want the Lord to intrude on his life by giving him such a sign. He wanted to be the one to rescue the land of Judah.

I think of the words from the old Frank Sinatra song, “I’ll do it my way.” It is part of our sinful nature to want to do it my way, especially when it comes to believing we can do everything or at least something to save ourselves. Norm Larson once told a story that I have never forgotten. He and Doris were traveling across the country. They stopped at a small diner for lunch. An older woman came in the front door and frantically said, “Can you help us? We are lost.” Behind her was her husband protesting loudly, “We are not lost. I still have half a tank of gas left.” The woman seeks help when she is lost. The man thinks he can still find where is going as long as there is enough gas in the tank. Male or female, when it comes to the all important matter of depending on God for where we are going when we die we are all stubborn as a mule like wicked Ahaz. We are wired by Adam’s fall to believe “I can do it my way.” We need the Lord to give us a sign that shocks us out of our foolishness and nonsense.

A family in Northern California became lost while they were searching for a Christmas tree. It started to snow heavily. They sought refuge in a culvert, huddled together, and covered themselves with branches and leaves. They next morning a search and rescue helicopter noticed the word “HELP” that they had trampled in the snow. How foolish it would have been for them to say to the people who came to rescue them, “We don’t need your help. We will find the way out on our own.” The virgin birth that challenges us to accept God’s help for our eternal salvation also comforts us as it points to Jesus as our only hope of being forgiven and loved by God.

What comfort it gives

The wicked, evil stubborn, monster Ahaz is told, “Hear now you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of God also? 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.” Ahaz refuses a sign for the Lord, so the Lord gives him a sign that gets his attention and the attention of the whole world. He says a virgin will be with child and give birth to a son. “Mother Gives Birth to Baby” That’s hardly worthy of a headline. But “Virgin Gives Birth to Baby!” That is a real newsmaker. That’s something that grabs our attention. That is like a flashing light or an electronic message board that stands out when we are driving down the road of life.

This great miracle of the virgin birth certainly grabbed a hold of Mary shook up her life.

The angel Gabriel told her, "You will be with child and give birth to a son and are to give him the name Jesus." She is engaged to be married to the Joseph the carpenter, but they have not had relations with each other. The angel tells her how such a conception can take place. "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." Then the angels says these well known words, "Nothing is impossible with God."

Poor Joseph. Mary tells him she is pregnant. She tells him about the visit from the angel Gabriel that said she would conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit and give birth to the very Son of God. Joseph is distraught. He decides to divorce her quietly for her unfaithfulness. One night an angel appears to Joseph in a dream. The angel says to him, "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." His whole view of life suddenly changes. His beloved future wife Mary has been faithful to him. She has been telling the truth. The baby was conceived through the Holy Spirit. The baby in her womb is the very Son of God.

Because of the virgin birth your entire view of life changes. You no longer believe in a closed system where everything in life around us is governed by laws and by our senses. One man living her in Santa Maria told me he will only believe in what he can see, smell, taste, hear, and feel. That is a closed system that precludes miracles aren't real. The virgin birth shows that our God can enter into our world and perform miracles. It is a sign that points to the greatest miracle of all, God becoming one of us. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth." The angel told the shepherds they would find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger who was their Savior, Christ the Lord. They had the opportunity to listen to Mary and Joseph tell about this amazing miracle of the virgin birth. They returned rejoicing and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard.

It may be OK to travel light when you are traveling on an airplane but please don't travel light when it comes to the teachings of the Bible. Those who want to travel light brush off the miracles of the Bible or toss them aside as irrelevant. The virgin birth does not allow us to travel light when it comes to the truthfulness of Scripture. It weighs us down and burdens us in a blessed way with the reality that a prophecy was made that a virgin would bring forth a son. That prophecy was fulfilled in great specificity. So we carry with us this huge and thick and wonderfully heavy and comforting thought that every Word of the Bible is true.

The virgin birth is important for our faith. The child conceived in the womb of Mary is our Lord and God. He was also conceived without sin. I was conceived in sin. My father and mother passed Adam's sin down to me. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. No sin was present in the tiny baby that lies in the manger in Bethlehem. The virgin birth is a powerful sign that says, "There is the one who is sinless and pure and holy. He is the pure source of forgiveness for your sin. He is the pure and sinless life you cannot find in yourselves. Oh, how we relish the words of John 1 that tell us "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

If you have ever given blood, you know they need to take a sample of your blood to make sure that it is not tainted by some dangerous virus that could be passed on to another person. The virgin birth assures us that there is no sin in the blood of Jesus. There is no

sin in his life. He is the perfect sacrifice we need. Amen.