

**Sermons**  
**The Sign (Part 2)**  
**Isaiah 7:1-17**  
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Turn with me again to Isaiah 7 as we continue our brief study of this magnificent prophecy of our Lord's birth. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a historic crucial part of the Christian faith. And yet, it is increasingly under attack. That's why we've chosen to go through this passage because here is the foundation for what we believe about the birth of Jesus Christ and its unique nature.

Just to show you how things have grown worse and worse about this issue, last year, I came across an article regarding the church in England. The article says more than a quarter of the Church of England clergy do not believe in the virgin birth of Christ, according to a survey carried out by the Telegraph. A poll of 500 clerics found that 27% privately reject the traditional story of Jesus' birth. The view of a Hampshire vicar was typical. "There was nothing special about His birth or childhood", he said, "it was His adult life that was extraordinary." He declined to be named - excuse me - he declined to be named saying, "I have a very traditional bishop, and this is one of those topics I do not go public on. I need to keep the job I have." Many of the skeptics who took part in the survey said that the story of the virgin birth was a product of poor biblical translations and literary tradition, rather than divine intervention. The Reverend Doctor Keith Archer said, "It is not particularly important because it's a debatable translation of a Hebrew prophecy which first appeared in Isaiah." Another leader added, "Writers at the time used to stress a person's importance by making up stories of their early life. I think that's exactly what happened here." The article goes on to say that most of those who cast doubt on the virgin birth, admitted that they would be presiding over traditional Christmas services which stressed the miraculous nature of Christ's birth. Hypocrites! Wolves in sheep's clothing.

But the problem isn't just across the pond in England. The problem is here in the States as well. A recent survey of 10,000 denominational ministers in our country - 7000 responses. Of those responding, one of the questions they asked was: do you believe that Jesus was born of a virgin?

Of the Methodists who responded, 60% said, “No”. Of the Episcopal ministers who responded, 40% said, “No”. Presbyterian, 41%. American Baptist, 34%. These are the ministers, the leaders of the church. They’re saying there is no basis, no foundation, for the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you a question. If you’re here this morning, probably you believe the virgin birth. Can you defend it? Can you defend the attacks against it from the passage that we’re looking at together this morning? If not, I hope by the time we’re done this morning, you will be able to.

We’re examining together one of the greatest Old Testament prophecies of our Lord’s birth - that prophecy found in verse 14 of Isaiah 7, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.” It’s really impossible to fully appreciate the richness of that prophecy without first understanding the circumstances in which it was given. And so, we began last week to look at the surrounding passage.

The section begins in chapter 7:1 and runs down through verse 17. It divides into three scenes. We looked at the first two scenes last week. Let me just briefly remind you of them and for those who weren’t with us. But if you weren’t here, let me encourage you to go online and listen because **it’s** impossible for me, in a brief time, to cover all that we talked about last week.

But scene one is found in the first two verses and this scene we called: Man’s desperate need for salvation. Man’s desperate need for salvation. And it’s personified in a man named Ahaz, King of Judah (the southern kingdom of the divided monarchy). Early in Ahaz’s reign over Judah, while he was still in his early to mid 20s, two powerful kings with large armies, Rezin from Syria and Pekah, King of Israel (the northern 10 tribes), banded together in an alliance, attacked Judah, attacked Ahaz, and besieged the city of Jerusalem. The Book of Chronicles tells us that in one day 120,000 of this man’s soldiers were killed/. And 200,000 women and children from Judah were taken captive to be slaves. In that same conflagration Ahaz’s second-in-command was killed and his own son died. From a physical circumstance point of view, things could not get

much worse for Ahaz. That alliance has reformed, and he's gotten word that they are coming again **to** siege the city of Jerusalem. And he's shaking like a leaf in the wind, verse 2 tells us.

But if his situation was bad politically and bad physically, it was much worse spiritually. Again, last week we saw in both Kings and Chronicles, in the parallel accounts, that while this man had a godly father and a godly grandfather, when he came of age, he turned against all of that and pursued his own way. He became involved up to his neck in gross idolatry. He participated in the pagan rites and the high places where religious prostitution and other things occurred. He was a wicked, perverted man. Ahaz desperately needed rescuing. He needed to be rescued from his physical **circumstances**, and he needed to be rescued from himself and from his sin - from his slavery to sin.

Ahaz is, in many ways, a perfect example, an illustration of all of us. We often find ourselves in desperate need of being rescued. Rescued from ourselves, from our slavery to sin and, most importantly, rescued from God's just anger (the Bible describes) against our sin. Man's desperate need.

That brings us to the second scene, we also looked at last week. In verses 3 through 9, we called the second scene: God gracious message of salvation. God, in grace, sends His prophet to Ahaz. He sends Isaiah and Isaiah's son. And He sends them to meet him and to offer to Ahaz physical deliverance from the kings that are coming against them (to promise that), but also, to offer him spiritual rescue, spiritual deliverance from his sins (his idolatry), from the penalty that his sins deserved before God. You can see this in the names of both Isaiah and his son. As they appeared before Ahaz, Ahaz was reminded of what he'd learned from his godly father and from his godly grandfather, because Isaiah's name means "Yahweh is salvation", "Yahweh rescues". It's exactly what he needed. And Isaiah's son (his oldest son) - his name, Shear-jashub, literally means "a remnant will return". In other words, they're going to be a few people who will turn from their sin, and truly turn back to God. So, as Ahaz meets these two men, in them God is preaching His grace. He's preaching rescue and salvation in Him. God is reminding him of what he'd learned from his godly heritage, that if he will return to the Lord his God, if he will repent, Yahweh will save him. He will rescue him, not only from these kings, but from the just

penalty against his sin. God was extending, that day, an invitation to Ahaz to believe in Him and in Him alone.

Now, that brings us today to the third great scene in this drama. We've called the third scene, found in verses 10 through 17: the miraculous sign of salvation. The miraculous sign of salvation. Look at verse 10: "Then the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 'Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God...'" The phrase, "then the Lord spoke again", clearly marks a change of scene. We can't be certain if these words were said immediately following verses 3 **through** 9, or if they were said later that day, or at some subsequent time. We can't be sure.

But, regardless, I love what Isaiah says in verse 10 and what it says about God. God is so full of grace, that He did not give up even on this wicked king. In spite of his sinful rebellion, in spite of his idolatry, in spite of his lack of faith, God invites Ahaz to ask for a sign. This was God's grace to this wicked man. God is like that, isn't He? He goes above and beyond. He's full of grace. Again and again, He extends the offer of His grace and mercy to those who rebel against Him. There may be someone here this morning who's heard that offer your whole life. But God, in His grace, just keeps extending it and extending it.

Here, he's told to ask for a sign. Now, sometimes individuals who were given the privilege to interact personally with God, ask for a sign themselves. For example, we remember the most famous one - he's back in Judges 6, where Gideon is told that he is to be the leader of the people and to rescue them from the Midianites, asks for a sign attached to a fleece. You remember the story. Sometimes men ask God for signs. In 2 Kings 20, Hezekiah is promised that he will get over the illness - the terminal illness that he has. And he asked God for a sign. Perhaps Calvin was right when he wrote, "We ought to grieve and lament that the sacred truth of God needs assistance on account of the defect of our flesh. God has spoken. What needs to be added to that? And yet, men ask for signs."

The Hebrew word for sign refers to a supernatural act intended to guarantee what God has said - a supernatural act intended to guarantee what God has said. And when God gives signs in the Scripture, He gives them to accomplish one of three objectives - either to warn, to instruct, or to

encourage faith. And, as we'll see next week, this sign was apparently intended to accomplish all of those. But, at its heart, a sign was designed to confirm the trustworthiness of the message and the messenger. You can see this in Isaiah. Turn over to Isaiah 38. In a different context - Isaiah 38:7. Here is Hezekiah, Ahaz's son. And it says (verse 7), "This shall be the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing that He has spoken..." *"I'm going to give you a sign. And here's what the sign is going to do. It's going to prove to you that the Lord will do this thing that He has spoken."* That's what a sign was there to do. And that's why people ask for signs.

But, sometimes, God is the one who suggested or who offers that He give a sign. That's exactly what happens with Ahaz. In fact, look back in Isaiah 7. He says, "Ask a sign..." This is a command. This is an imperative: *"Ask me for a sign!"* And then Isaiah adds, "make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." You know what he was saying? God was saying, *"Listen. Make it as hard as you want. I'm telling you to ask for a miracle, something that only I can do, to prove to you **that I am a savior, that I'll rescue you.**"* But Ahaz will not respond.

As E.J. Young, the notable commentator on the Book of Isaiah writes, "The sign may be in the depth or in the height, on the earth or in the sky, but Ahaz will not ask. He has no intention of obeying. He turns from God, but he turns knowing precisely what God's will is and what God requires of him. He is commanded to believe. The gospel has been preached to him. That he refuses to believe, is to be attributed to the fact that he hates the Lord and leans upon his own understanding."

While that may be his heart, he couches his heart in hypocritical language. Look at how he responds. Verse 12: "But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!'" What a hypocrite! This is just disobedience and disrespect of God. He abuses Deuteronomy 6:16, takes it out of its context, to excuse himself from what God has just commanded him to do. It's the worst kind of hypocrisy and false piety. Remember, Ahaz is an idolater. He worships the gods of the nations around Israel, but he has not completely abandoned the worship of the God of Israel (of Yahweh). He still worships **Him** as well. And so, we're left **asking** ourselves, when we read his response, what is going on in this man's heart? Is he just a pragmatist looking to leave all of his

options open? Or is he purely a politician **trying** to make everyone happy? Why would he respond like this? It doesn't make any sense. I mean, put yourself in his shoes. Even if he's not inclined to believe Isaiah, what could it hurt to ask for a sign? He could make it extraordinarily, outrageously difficult. And then if it happened, he would be sure that what God had said was going to be true. And even if it happens, even if he asks for a sign and the sign happens, he can still refuse to follow the words of Isaiah and to follow his own plan. So, what possible reason is there for not asking? There's only one: he's already made up his mind that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is weaker than the gods - the other gods that he worships. He's already made up his mind what he's going to do.

Turn back to 2 Chronicles 28. Here we learn what's going on in the heart of this man - why he would respond with this sort of hypocrisy. 2 Chronicles 28. He's going to do two things - verse 16. First, he's going to send to Assyria, the dominant world power of his time, for help. Verse 16 of 2 Chronicles 28 says, "At that time King Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria for help." *"Listen, I don't need Yahweh. I don't need you Isaiah. I've got a plan. I've got my own plan. The biggest, strongest, most powerful military in the world is what I need. I don't need Yahweh."*

But he also is going to do something else. Look down in verse 22 of the same chapter. "Now in the time of his distress this same King Ahaz became yet more unfaithful to the Lord. For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus [the gods of Syria] which had defeated him, and said, 'Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.'" You know what he's saying? He's saying, *"Listen, the fact that Syria beat my armies is evidence that their god is stronger than the God of Israel. And so, I'm going to hedge my bets and I'm going to pray for their gods to help me."* Syncretism. This is what's in our world today, isn't it? Take one, take all. I'll have Yahweh as part of the pantheon of my gods, but I'm not going to have Him exclusively. A cafeteria approach to religion.

Ahaz's his response to Isaiah is not intended to placate Isaiah but the people around Ahaz and the rest of the nation. You see, by piously refusing to seek a sign, he can come across well. He can still act like he respects Yahweh. And yet, he can still do what he wants. The commentator

Kyle writes, “What a pious sound this has! And yet, his self-hardening reached its culminating point in these words.” He hardened his heart and brought upon himself the fate that Isaiah had promised in Isaiah 6.

But Isaiah is not fooled. He knows what’s going on. He knows the score and God knows as well. Look at verse 13. The response to Ahaz is, “Listen now, O house of David [he broadens it not only to Ahaz but to the whole dynasty, to the nation]! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well?” You see, Ahaz was feigning respect for God but in reality, he and the people were wearying God by their utter lack of respect for God.

Turn back to Isaiah 1. Isaiah has already brought this up - Isaiah 1, beginning in verse 10. He says, “*Listen, I’m sick of all of your religious acts. I’m sick of your sacrifices, even though I commanded them of you.*” Verse 12: “When you come to appear before Me, / Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, / Incense is an abomination to Me. / New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies - / I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, / They have become a burden to Me; / I am weary of bearing them.” Why? Because it was all a show. They were performing all the right religious functions, but there was no heart. They were hypocrites. Their hearts were into themselves and what they wanted, just like Ahaz. And God saw through it all.

Turn over to (still in Isaiah), turn over to chapter 43:24. You see the same thing. Isaiah 43:24. He basically says... Beginning in verse 22 he says, “*Listen, you think you’ve brought Me sacrifices, but you really haven’t.*” Verse 24 culminates it. He says, “You have bought Me not sweet cane with money, / Nor have you filled Me with the fat of your sacrifices [this has not been about Me, He said]; / Rather you have burdened Me with your sins, / You have wearied Me with your iniquities.” You know what God was saying? “*Don’t think for a moment that your showing up at the right time, at the right place for worship fools Me. You don’t respect Me. You’re choosing to do whatever you want and then you’re showing up and you think I’m*

going to be happy with that. I'm not. **I'm not** in for the crumbs", God says. "I'm not satisfied with that. It's not about Me".

In fact, look over in chapter 65, 65:3. He says, "*Doing that constantly provokes Me to My face and you're involved, not only in offering sacrifices to Me, but you're even offering sacrifices to other gods*", He goes on to say. Verse 5: "[In the midst of all of your sin this is what you say], 'Keep to yourself, do not come near me, / For I am holier than you!'" So, there's this facade of religion, but there's no true fear of God, no true respect. The people were choosing to sin in whatever way they wanted, and God says (look at verse 5), "These are smoke in My nostrils, / A fire that burns all the day. Behold, it is written before Me, / I will not keep silent, but I will repay; / I will even repay into their bosom." God says, "*It's personal and I'm going to deal with their sin. They think they're fooling Me by showing up at the right place at the right time, and then living the way they want to live. I'm not fooled.*" This was Ahaz feigning respect for God. Listen, don't imagine for a moment that you, or anyone else, can pull a fast one on God. He knows.

Turn back to verse 14 of Isaiah 7. He knows and he wearies of hypocrisy and so, verse 14 begins, "Therefore [Therefore. '*Ahaz, because of who you are, because of the false profession you've made, because of the subterfuge of your profession of faith in Me, because you will not ask for a sign when I've commanded you to, therefore*'] the Lord Himself will give you a sign..." By the way, the "you" in verse 14 is plural, not singular. This sign is intended not just for Ahaz, but for all the people.

Now, that brings us to the key question: what is the sign? What is the sign? Look at verse 14. "Behold" - this is a Hebrew word for a solemn and important announcement. It's like saying, "*This is important. Listen up!*" "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." So, the sign is a male child.

Immediately, the question comes up: who is this child? Well, you may not know this, or you might be aware of this, but there are three different views about this child. Let me briefly tell you what they are and then we'll see if we can work through them. The first view is this was a



child born during the time of Isaiah, around the time of this prophecy, and most who say that say that it was either Hezekiah, Ahaz's son, or it was Isaiah's second son, a boy we meet in chapter 8 by the name of Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Probably not a popular name for you **to** name your children. So, the first view is this was a human child born during the time of Isaiah. The second view of this passage is that this was a child born during the time of Isaiah and the Messiah. In other words, they believe in what's called double fulfillment. It was fulfilled twice. It was fulfilled in a child born then in Isaiah's time, and it was fulfilled, ultimately and perfectly, in Messiah. The third view is that this child refers to Messiah alone, to Christ alone.

Now, how can we decide which of these views is right? Well, I think if we look together at the character of this child, how this child is described here, I think it'll become clear. Whoever this child is, he is certainly unique. Notice, first of all, he's unique in his conception: "a virgin will be with child". A virgin will conceive.

Now, a lot of ink has been spilled over the last 200 years on the word *virgin*. The Hebrew word is *alma*. It occurs nine times in the Old Testament. It's used to describe a woman of marriageable age and one of whose virtues is virginity. Virginity is obviously the focus in Genesis 24:43 where a bride is being sought for Isaac. In that culture, marrying a wife who was a virgin was a very important thing. And so, that's obviously in focus at that point. In the Song of Solomon 6:8, this word *alma* is used. And in that verse, there are three kinds of women described - three categories of women. There are queens, who are obviously married women. Then there are concubines, who are obviously not married women but are sexually involved with the king. And then there is the third category of *alma*, which seems clearly to be pointing to a category of women who are not married and who are not sexually involved. E.J. Young writes, "*Alma* is never employed of a married woman. And, in fact, it seems the only word in the Hebrew language which unequivocally signifies an unmarried woman." By the way, this was so clear that even in Martin Luther's time, this was a battle then as well. In Martin Luther's time, he made this challenge, "If a Jew or Christian can prove to me that in any other passage of Scripture *alma* means a married woman, I will give him a hundred florins. Although God alone knows where I may find them". He says, "*I'll risk what I don't have. I'm so sure of this.*" So, this woman in Isaiah 7:14 was unmarried.

But was she a virgin? The biblical answer is *absolutely*. Briefly, let me give you several arguments for translating the word here “virgin” as the New American Standard has done. Several arguments. Argument number one: the uses of *alma* in the Old Testament and other Jewish literature. I have in my notes here, a list of the nine times that it occurs in the Old Testament. I’ve looked at those **in their** context. There is a more eminent scholar named Robert Dick Wilson (back at the beginning of the 1900s) who wrote in the Princeton Theological Review, that when you look at all of the evidence, not only from the Old Testament and the use of *alma* there, but in Jewish literature at large two conclusions immediately become obvious. One is, it’s never a married woman. And, secondly, he said every *alma* was considered a virgin until proven not to be. So, even the Hebrew word *alma* argues for virgin.

Second argument: the context calls for the use of the word virgin. The meaning of a word is always ultimately determined by its context. Remember the context here: God has just told Ahaz to ask for a sign: make it as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven. Ask for a miraculous sign. And Ahaz says, “Oh, not me!” And so, God says, “*Alright I’ll give you a sign. Here is a sign that I’m going to rescue you. You ready? A young woman will conceive.*” What sign is that? If that’s a sign, there’s a whole lot of “signing” going on here at Countryside! What about a married young woman conceiving? Is that a sign? What about even an unmarried young woman conceiving? Is that a sign of miraculous proportion? Of course not. None of those fit the context of a miraculous sign. Virgin is the only word that makes sense in the context.

Argument number three: the Septuagint’s translation. A hundred to two hundred years before Christ (and this is important, listen carefully) ... A hundred to two hundred years before Jesus Christ was born, there was a group of Jewish scholars - tradition says there were seventy of them. That’s why the fruit of their labor is called the Septuagint after the word for seventy. And they translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. When they came to Isaiah 7:14... Now, remember these are Jewish scholars. They know nothing about Jesus of Nazareth. This is 100 to 200 hundred years before. When they came to Isaiah 7:14, they chose a Greek word for *alma* that can only mean, that does only mean virgin - unequivocally, without exception.

Argument number 4 for virgin in Isaiah 7:14 and this is the strongest evidence of all. It's Matthew 1:23. Turn there with me. Matthew 1:23. In Matthew 1:23, Matthew records Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, 'God with us.'" Now, remember who Matthew is. Matthew was a disciple of Jesus Christ. He was taught the Old Testament by Jesus Himself. Matthew was inspired - the writings of his gospel was inspired by the Holy Spirit. And when he chooses to record Isaiah 7:14 he uses the Septuagint translation, and he uses the unequivocal Greek word for virgin. And this is abundantly clear through the rest of the New Testament record. Just look back in Matthew 1:18: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit." Just another way to say virgin. Verse 25: "but [Joseph] kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son..." She was a virgin.

Luke makes the same point. Luke 1:27 (we read it a couple of weeks ago) says, "[that Gabriel appeared] to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary." Chapter 34 of Luke 1. I'm sorry, verse 34 of Luke 1: "Mary said to the angel [once she's been told she's going to have a child, Mary's response is, well, wait a minute], 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'" "*Look, you don't understand. I can't be pregnant because I'm a virgin.*" Chapter 3:23 makes the same point in the genealogy of Jesus. It begins like this: "When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, *as was supposed*, the son of Joseph..." So, everywhere you turn in the record of the New Testament, the evidence points back to Isaiah 7:14 as a virgin, a virgin.

Now, let me just ask you honestly: does that bother you? Does it bother you that the Bible describes Jesus as having been born of a virgin? It bothers a lot of ministers apparently. It bothers a lot of Christians. But this is nothing for God. The God who made the world, who forms us within our mother's wombs, you think that's hard for God? Anselm, writing 1000 years ago, says, listen, there are five ways God can make a human being, a human body. He can make a human being with a man and a woman. That's how all of us are here. He can make a human being without a man and a woman. That's how Adam showed up. He can make a human being miraculously enabling a man and a woman past **childbearing** age to have children. That's

Isaac. He can make a man without a woman. That's ... Or excuse me, can make a person by using a man without a woman and that's Eve. So, is it really a hard thing for God to make a human being using a woman without a man, and that's Christ? So, this child was to be unique in His conception. He was conceived by a virgin.

Turn back to Isaiah 7:14. Not only is He unique in His conception, He's also unique in His birth. It says, "[a virgin] shall bear a Son". This child's mother will still be a virgin when she gives birth. Is that important? You bet it's important. Listen carefully. Not only was Jesus' mother a virgin when she conceived, but she was a virgin when she gave birth to Christ. In Matthew 1:25, which I just read to you, Matthew makes a big point of this. He says, "[Joseph] kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son..." Literally, he did not know her. He did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth. Why? Well, the reason is clear. Because Isaiah had said that not only would a virgin conceive, but that a virgin would bear a son; that, as a virgin, she would give birth. And so, it was absolutely essential to fulfill that prophecy and Matthew makes that very point in his gospel.

By the way, the implication here is absolutely contrary to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. It says she was a virgin *until* the child was born. If you were to look at Mark 6:3, you would discover that Jesus grew up one of at least seven children. After His birth - He was the first, He was virgin born... After His birth, Joseph and Mary had the physical relationship in marriage and, as a result of that, had at least six more children. His four brothers are named **in** Mark 6:3 - James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. And He had at least two sisters because the plural is used - "and His sisters". So, Jesus grew up in a family as the oldest of at least seven children.

Now, why is it important that Mary was still a virgin when Jesus was born? Because it fulfills Isaiah 7:14 which makes that explicit prophecy. And it's secondly important - and this comes back to where we started - it's because it proves that Jesus alone was the fulfillment of that prophecy. Couldn't have been Hezekiah. Couldn't have been Maher-shalal-hash-baz because their mothers were not virgins until their birth. As Robert Raymond writes, "Matthew clearly intimates that Mary's virginity throughout the duration of her pregnancy was necessary to fulfill

the Isaiah 7:14 statement. This fact eliminates a dual fulfillment for Isaiah 7:14. In other words, a child then and the Messiah. It eliminates that and requires that the prophecy be applied exclusively to Jesus Christ.” I absolutely agree with that.

He was unique in His conception, unique in His birth, He was unique in His name. Look at verse 14 again: “and they shall call His name Immanuel”. It is a unique name - occurs only three times in all the Bible - here in Isaiah 7:14, one chapter later in Isaiah 8:8 where Immanuel is described as owning the land of Israel, and in Matthew 1 where it’s spoken in fulfillment of Christ. So, what does this name mean - Immanuel? Well, Matthew translates it for us: “God with us”. But more literally, when we think of that, we may... don’t have the picture of it. More literally, we could translate it like this: “God among us. God in the middle of us. God one of us.” That’s the idea. As John Calvin said, “This name cannot be applied to anyone who is not God.”

This child will be unique in His conception, unique in His birth, and unique in His name. He will also be unique in His nature. This child will be a human being. He will be conceived in a mother’s womb, and He will be born just the same way as other children. But He’ll be without a human father because He’s going to be born of a virgin. He’s going to be a human being, but he can properly be called “God among us”. You know what Immanuel comes from - the two Hebrew words Immanuel comes from? *Immanu* and *El*. *Immanu* means among you. *El* means God. *El* is one of the Hebrew words for God. Isaiah uses that same word 21 times in his prophecy. Never, without exception, does he use it for anyone but deity. So, this child is not only human (*Immanu* - with us, among us, one of us), but He’s *El*. He’s deity. He’s God. E.J. Young writes, “We cannot regard the child, then, as a contemporary of Isaiah. Rather, in dim and strange vision, Isaiah looks forward to the birth of one whose very presence brings God to His people.”

Here’s the irony. You know, the Jews were always looking for signs. When Jesus came, they were constantly asking Him for signs. In Matthew 12 they ask Him for a sign to demonstrate the reality of who He was. In Matthew 16 they ask Him again. In John 2 they ask Him for a sign, and He gives them various signs, including His resurrection.

Turn over to John 12. John 12. This is an amazing passage. John 12:35. Jesus gives His last and final invitation to Israel - his last **gospel** invitation to Israel. Verse 35: "So Jesus said to them, 'For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.'" His last great gospel invitation to the nation. "These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them. [Now watch verse 37]. But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him." Why? Why could they see all of the signs and not believe? The same reason Ahaz didn't believe the sign back **in** Isaiah 7. Here's why. Verse 38: "This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: 'Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, 'He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.'" When did Isaiah say that? That was part of the charge God gave Isaiah in that great chapter - Isaiah 6, you remember, when he sees God high and lifted up. He sees Yahweh on His throne and the glory of God fills the temple and the angels are crying out, "Holy, Holy, Holy". Well, look at the next verse, verse 41: "These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him." Whose glory? Christ's glory. He saw the glory of Christ. If you go back to Isaiah 6, what you have in Isaiah 6 is a Christophany, an appearance of Jesus Christ. Isaiah saw the exalted Son of God on a throne, high and lifted up. And so, the one who appeared to Isaiah in all His glory, in chapter six, was the same one who would condescend to be born to a virgin and become man in Isaiah 7. The only one who could rightly be called "God among us".

The irony is that according to their own prophet, the prophet Isaiah, Jesus and His virgin birth was the sign and they missed it. They looked for some other sign. He was the sign. Listen, you want a sign that God is a savior, that He will rescue you from yourself, and from your sin, and from His own wrath against your sin? Here's the sign. Here's the sign God will do that - a virgin will conceive and, while still a virgin, she will give birth and that child will be both human and divine. He will rightly be called Immanuel "God among us". Jesus Christ is God's sign to Ahaz and to us that He is by nature a savior, a rescuer to those who will turn to Him. He's

willing to rescue those who will come. That's the message of Christmas. Jesus is the sign, and next week, we'll see exactly what He's a sign of.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for this great prophecy of our Lord. We thank You for the reality that it's clear that He was to be born of a virgin and be rightly called Immanuel "God among us" - being fully human, born into this world as we have been born into this world, born of a woman, and yet at the same time, God - God in flesh. Father, we thank You for such amazing grace. We thank You that He is the sign to us, that His coming that we celebrate in this season is the ultimate sign to us that You are a savior, that You will rescue those who turn to You. Father, we thank You and praise You, in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen!