

Sermons
The Sign (Part 3)
Isaiah 7:1-17
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

On Tuesday, it's our joy, with family and friends, to celebrate together the birth of our Lord - the amazing reality that 2000 years ago, the eternal Son of God took on human nature. And He did so in much the same way that we do. He was conceived in the womb of a woman, albeit a virgin, and nine months later He was born. In some ways, a normal birth. In other ways, an absolutely remarkable birth. No person has ever been anticipated as Christ was anticipated. We as human beings can look forward to and anticipate the birth of our own children, the birth of our grandchildren, the birth of the children of friends of ours, possibly even the birth of our great grandchildren. But our expectations for the birth of others seems to end with the lifespan of our own lives. We don't anticipate the birth of those after our death. But in the history of the world, no life has ever been more anticipated than the life of Christ.

Scripture records that over 300 Old Testament prophecies predicted that He would come and were fulfilled in His first coming. That makes His birth absolutely unique. John Walvoord, his excellent book called "Jesus Christ our Lord" writes, "The existence on such a wide scale of prophecy concerning Christ, before He was born, is of great significance since no other person in all the world ever was predicted in this way nor had such detailed prophecies describing to Him the power and attributes of God. Such prophecy, in itself, was a miracle and bore testimony to a supernatural person whose claims demand that we worship and obey Him."

For the last two weeks we have been examining together one of the greatest of those Old Testament prophecies about our Lord's birth - the prophecy found in Isaiah 7:14. I invite you to turn there with me again this morning. Of course, Isaiah 7:14 says in those familiar words, "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." To fully appreciate, we're discovering, the richness of this prophecy, you first have to understand the circumstances in which it was given.

Those circumstances are filled out for us in the surrounding passage - Isaiah 7:1 running down through verse 17. And that section divides into three scenes. The first scene is in verses 1 and 2: man's desperate need of salvation. Man's need is there represented in one person and at one period of time the King of Judah, Ahaz, and the kingdom over which he was ruler. But what he was suffering is symptomatic of every human being's need. So, what we find here, is man's desperate need of salvation. We all find ourselves, to some degree or other, in the same circumstances that Ahaz found himself.

Verses 3 through 9, we looked at the second scene, which we called: God's gracious message of salvation. Into man's desperate need, God interjects through Isaiah the message of deliverance. Again, very specific through Isaiah but we have received that same message through Isaiah's writings as well as the mouth of our Lord and the writings of the apostles in the New Testament - God's gracious message of deliverance offered to Ahaz and offered to us.

The third scene is from verse 10 down through verse 17 and we called this third scene: the miraculous sign of salvation. And last week we began to look at this third scene. Notice verse 11, Isaiah told King Ahaz, "Ask a sign ... make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." The Lord here is encouraging Ahaz to ask for a miracle to confirm what He has told him through Isaiah. This was the normal purpose of a sign - to confirm the message and the messenger were worthy of trust. How does Ahaz respond to this gracious offer from God? Verse 12, he says, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!" In utter hypocrisy, Ahaz uses the words of Deuteronomy 6:16, that our Lord Himself would later use in His life, to say, "Oh no, I won't test the Lord", even though the Lord had commanded him to ask for a sign.

So, why is that Ahaz refuses the Lord's offer of a sign? Well, as we discovered last week, he'd already come to the conclusion that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was weaker than the gods around or the gods of the nations, particularly the gods of Syria. And so, he had made up his mind to pray to the gods of Syria for help and to form a military alliance with Assyria, the dominant world power of his time. He had a plan. He had his own solution. He didn't need Isaiah and he didn't need Yahweh to help.

Verse 14 begins with the word “Therefore”. God is saying, “[Ahaz, since you will not ask for a sign in your hypocrisy, 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.’” The sign is a male child, a male child that is utterly unique. He is unique in His conception: a virgin will be with child. He is unique in His birth: a virgin will bear a son. He is unique in His name: she will call His name Immanuel - immanu-El in the Hebrew, “God among us”. And He’s unique in His nature because this child will not only be human (He’ll be conceived in the womb of a woman and born of a woman), but He’ll also be deity. *El - immanu-El*. *El* being the Hebrew word for God that Isaiah uses every time he uses it for deity. So, the sign is that a virgin will conceive and bear a son and that son can legitimately be called “God among us”. So, the birth to a virgin of the divine human Messiah, Jesus Christ, is the sign.

Today, as we anticipate our celebration of Christmas, I want us together to look at what the sign means. What did it mean for Ahaz and what does it mean for us? You see, a sign always points to some other reality. Recently, we built a new sign down here on Countryside Court with the name of our church on it. That sign is not the reality. That sign is not the church. That sign merely points to the reality. It points to this building in which the church meets. The same thing is true with signs in the Bible. In the same way, a sign points to some reality, to some truth. Sometimes, the signs of the Bible point to or confirm only one truth. But in the context of Isaiah and in the context of Isaiah 7:14, this sign is much more complex. It doesn’t point to just one truth, but it points to several truths. And I want to examine those truths together this morning.

To what truths does the sign point? The first truth of the birth of the divine human Messiah establishes is this: Yahweh is the only true God. Yahweh, that is the God of Israel, the God who made Himself known as “I AM”, **the** appellation YHWH, is the Hebrew consonants that mean “He is”. When God delivers His name in the Old Testament, He says, “I AM”. When we describe Him, we say “He is”. And that’s Yahweh. We’re talking about the one we know as “He is”, the eternally existent one. Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is the one and only true God.

Isaiah gave this great prophecy Ahaz that predicts the coming of Jesus Christ, you’ll remember, in 734 BC. Now, just to give you some perspective, imagine for a moment that someone was

writing in 1278 AD - 1278 AD (*anno domini* - "in the year of our Lord"). And imagine that that person accurately predicted the birth of one specific child to be born in 2008. Writing in 1278, predicting accurately the birth of a child in 2008 - that's how long before Christ's birth that Isaiah made this prophecy - 730 years before it.

Now, what does that tell us? What does that sign of? What is it pointing to? Well, God Himself constantly makes the point that His planning of the future, His telling us about His plan, and then His carrying out His plan, is a sign that He alone is the one true God. He constantly makes this point in Isaiah's prophecy. Let me show you a few examples.

Turn to Isaiah 41, Isaiah 41:21. God says, "Present your case," the Lord says. "Bring forward your strong arguments," The King of Jacob says, "Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; / As for the former events, declare what they were, / That we may consider them and know their outcome. / Or announce to us what is coming; Declare the things that are going to come afterward [why?], / That we may know that you are gods..." What we have in this text is the one true God issuing a challenge to all of the false gods, all of those that aren't truly gods, that the peoples of the world worship. And God says, "*Let your gods predict the future and then bring it to pass. And that will be an evidence that they are the true ... that they are truly gods.*"

Chapter 44, you see this same point again. Chapter 44:6: "Thus says the LORD [when you LORD in all caps like that, that's God's personal name, that's Yahweh, that's 'HE IS'], the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD [Yahweh] of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, / And there is no God besides Me. / Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; / Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, / From the time that I established the ancient nation. / And let them declare to them / the things that are coming / And the events that are going to take place. Do not tremble and do not be afraid; / Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? / And you are My witnesses. / Is there any God besides Me, / Or is there any other Rock? / I know of none.'" God says, "*What makes Me unique, what makes and distinguishes Me is the one true God is the reality that I declare what's coming and I bring it to pass.*"

In chapter 46:5, our Lord comes back to this again. This is obviously crucial for us to understand. Isaiah 46:5: “To whom would you liken Me / And make Me equal and compare Me, / That we would be alike?” And then He describes the idols - those who make idols in versus 6 and 7. And then He says in verse 8, “Remember this, and be assured; / Recall it to mind, you transgressors. / Remember the former things long past, / For I am God, and there is no other; / I am God, and there is no one like Me [*and here’s what distinguishes Me from idols*’, God says], / Declaring the end from the beginning, / And from ancient times things which have not been done, / Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, / And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’” Look at the end of verse 11: “Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. / I have planned it, surely I will do it.” God says, “*What distinguishes Me as the one true and living God from all the gods of the nations which are not gods, is the reality that I tell you what I’m going to do and I bring it to pass.*”

In chapter 48:3, God comes back to this theme yet again. He says, “I declared the former things long ago / And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. / Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass [why, God, did You do this? Verse 5] Because I know that you are obstinate... Therefore, I declared them to you long ago, / Before they took place I proclaimed them to you, / So that [in order that, here’s why] you would not say, ‘My idol has done them.’” God said, “*I wanted you to know that I am the one true God and there is no god besides Me, and so, I told you in advance what I was going to do as evidence to confirm that I am, in fact, the one true God.*”

You know, I don’t think we really consider this enough. I don’t think we give this enough weight. God Himself obviously does, and He wants us to. The Bible is filled with prophecies, often made hundreds of years before they occur. And we can look back and see that many of them have been fulfilled. And God intends that every one of those would strengthen our confidence that we serve the one and only living and true God, that all others supposed deities are not. Buddha didn’t predict and carry out the future. Confucius didn’t make hundreds of prophecies that were perfectly fulfilled. Muhammad didn’t promise future events and then deliver on every one of them. And it’s true with any other religion and any other prophet, whether you’re talking about Joseph Smith and Mormonism, or **Mary Baker Eddy** and Christian Science, or any other “ism” you want to include, any other faith you want to include,

God stands alone in this. Our God alone has declared what would happen from long before and then made it happen. 730 years before the virgin birth of the Messiah, God predicted it through the mouth of his prophet.

Why is such prophecy and effective apologetic for the true God? Because think of what prophecy of the future implies about the one who tells you. **It** means that our God has unparalleled knowledge of what's happening in our world. It means that He has a sovereign will and that will determine what will happen. And it means that He has unlimited power at His disposal to carry out what He plans to do. What is the truth that the virgin birth of the Messiah points us toward? It points us to the reality, to the truth that Yahweh, the God of the Bible, is the one and only true God.

Even in his day, Ahaz had enough of the Old Testament. And in that Old Testament, he had many evidences of fulfilled prophecy that proved to him the singularity of the God of Israel. But we today have so much more - more than 300 prophecies about Jesus Christ and His first coming were all written at least 400 years before His birth, when the Old Testament canon was closed. And every one of those 300 plus prophecies were perfectly fulfilled in His life. This should strengthen and confirm our faith that we worship and serve the only true God and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second truth to which the sign points: not only to the reality that Yahweh is the one and only true God but, secondly, that Yahweh is sovereign over human history. Yahweh is sovereign over human history. It's not surprising that this is one of the signs or truths to which the sign points, rather, because this is a major theme of Isaiah's entire book, this entire prophecy. There are sections of Isaiah that we don't really delight in when we read them devotionally. One of those is Isaiah 13 all the way through chapter 23. Because in chapter 13 through 23, Isaiah presents what he calls "11 burdens", that is, 11 pronouncements of judgment against all the nations of the ancient world, that's around the Middle East. He included in that list Babylon, and Assyria, and Philistia, and Moab, Syria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, Judah, Phoenicia - every nation that was part of the world powers of that time are included. And Isaiah prophesies that Yahweh, the God of Israel, will eventually bring judgment on each one of those eleven nations - which is

exactly, of course, what history records. But why did God include that in Isaiah's prophecy? It was to show us and them of that time and everyone since, that He is in fact the sovereign of the world, that He's not merely Israel's God, He is the sovereign of all nations and of all human history. He determines when nations rise and when they fall. At His word empires are built, and at His command they are destroyed.

The same is true with Isaiah 7:14. This prophecy is made some 730 years before it occurs and it points to the reality that our God controls and directs history to accomplish His purposes. But Isaiah 7:14 demonstrates that sovereign control of history in two very specific ways.

First of all, it demonstrates God's sovereign control of history in that He will bring lasting judgment on the nation of Judah for her sins. Look at verse 15 of Isaiah 7: "He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good." He, that is, the Messiah (we just were introduced to in verse 14) - the Messiah will eat curds and honey. What does that mean? Well, if you look in the context down at verse 22 of the same chapter where the same expression is used, you discover that there is clearly, in verse 22, an indication that the land of Judah has been devastated. It's been overrun and devastated. So, in other words (back to verse 15), Isaiah is predicting that when the Messiah is born, Israel will have been decimated and will be living with the results of that. That's exactly what we find when Jesus was born. You go back to 586 BC and Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians. And she never fully recovered. Only a small number of her people returned from the Babylonian captivity. And from that point until the coming of Christ, she was dominated by a series of world powers. After the Babylonians came the Medo-Persians and then the Greeks. And in 63 BC, she was conquered by the Romans. And so, when the predicted Messiah was in fact born, He lived in a land that was under foreign control, that was oppressed by **the** Romans, just as Isaiah had prophesied.

There's a second specific way that the birth of the Messiah specifically points to God's sovereign control of history - not only in the judgment of the nation, Judah, but in showing us that God will order history to accomplish His salvation purposes. God will order history to accomplish His salvation purposes.

Have you ever wondered... In this prophecy, Jesus is described as being born of a virgin. Have you ever wondered why Jesus needed to be born of a virgin? You ever thought about that? Many will say, when asked that question, "Well, it was to protect Jesus' humanity from being tainted by sin. Since He had no human father, He didn't inherit a sin nature", they will say. Now, on the surface, that sounds good but that's probably not the primary reason that Jesus needed to be born of a virgin. How do I know that? Well, take my wife for example. She is a wonderful woman, but she still has a sin nature. And so did your mother. And so did my mother. And so did Jesus' mother. Mary, in her magnificent Magnificat, cries out that she needs a savior. She was a sinner in need of a savior, just like all the rest of us are. In fact, it's interesting that when David describes how deeply his own sinfulness had permeated his soul, what does he say in Psalm 51? "In sin my mother conceived me." He's saying that I was a sinner from the point of conception. And he even attaches that sinfulness, to some degree, to his mother. So, if Jesus was going to be born to a human at all, the Holy Spirit had to supernaturally protect Him from the taint of sin, which is exactly what the Spirit did. In Luke 1:35, the angel tells Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you... and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God." You see, it was the Holy Spirit who shielded Jesus in His humanity from the depravity that would have come to him even from Mary, and certainly would have from Joseph as well, if Joseph had been his father.

So, if that's not the reason for the virgin birth - to protect Jesus from sin - then what is? It's because of a man whom you may never have heard of - a man named Jeconiah. I won't take time to turn there but in Jeremiah 22:30, Jeremiah writes this prophecy, "Thus says the Lord, / 'Write this man down childless, / A man who will not prosper in his days; / For no man of his descendants will prosper / Sitting on the throne of David / Or ruling again in Judah.'" "*Jeconiah, no descendant of yours will ever sit on the throne of David.*" God pronounced a curse on Jeconiah. But here's the problem. Jeconiah is in the line of David. God had promised David that one of his descendants would be the Messiah and would reign forever. So, how can both of those things be true? And if you want to complicate matters even a little more, Jeconiah, who had that curse, shows up in the genealogy of Joseph in Matthew 1. In order to claim the throne, in order for Jesus to have the legal right to David's throne, His line had to go through Jeconiah. The royal line had to pass through Jeconiah. But in order to fulfill the prophecy of Jeremiah, the

Messiah could not be of the seed of Jeconiah. God's solution: the virgin birth. Since Joseph married Mary before Jesus was born, Jesus was legitimately the son and legal heir of Joseph and therefore, through Joseph, Jesus was legally in the royal line. And through Mary, Jesus was physically related to David, not through Jeconiah, but through another descendant, Nathan. You see, only the miracle of the virgin birth could have permitted Christ to be the complete fulfillment of the promise made to David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne, and the curse made to Jeconiah that none of his would. So, the sign of the virgin birth of Christ points to the wonderful truth that God is sovereign over history, and He works out His great eternal plan of redemption.

Just think for a moment about what this tells us about our God. He is in control and He's working out His eternal plan to show grace to those He has especially chosen to set His love upon. And, by the way, that includes today because today is tomorrow's history. God's plan of redemption is marching on today. You're part of that plan and God's plan cannot be altered; it cannot be stopped. If it requires a virgin giving birth to a son, then God will do it. "For", as Gabriel told Mary, "nothing is impossible with God." Think about what this means for us and how God's eternal plan of redemption intersects with our own lives. If you're in Christ, you're part of that plan. This means that nothing will stand in God's way of fulfilling His purpose for you. What did Paul tell the Philippians? I love it. In Philippians 1:6 he says, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you [that is, God] will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." God is sovereign in history, working out His redemptive purposes even as He's promised.

So, the sign points to the truth that our God is the one and only true God, secondly that our God is sovereign over history. The third great truth that this sign points to is that Yahweh alone can provide physical deliverance. Yahweh alone can provide physical deliverance. In other words, deliverance from the troubles of this life. Remember the circumstances which prompted this prophecy? Those of you who weren't with us, let me give you a brief thumbnail. Two kings - Rezin, King of Syria, and Pekah, king of the northern 10 tribes of Israel - have attacked Judah, the southern kingdom. And they have reassembled their armies - they've already attacked and now they've reassembled their armies for another assault. And, in fact, when Ahaz hears this

prophecy, he's outside the city wall of Jerusalem inspecting the city's primary water supply because he knows the city is about to be under siege again. And as an expression of His grace to this wicked king, God assures Ahaz that their attack, the attack of these two kings, will not succeed. He will physically deliver him. Look at verse 16: "For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken." In other words, God is telling this wicked king that He will deliver him and Judah from the immediate physical threat that they face. "*I will deliver you*", God says, "*It's not going to happen.*"

But how could a prophecy about the Messiah which - of course the Messiah doesn't come as I said for more than 700 years - how could that have any time relevance to Ahaz, which it appears to have in verse 16? Clearly, the references to Messiah - we were introduced to Messiah in verse 14, verse 15. It's clear that it's about Messiah. So, there's no reason to expect that this is any different. Verse 16 has some connection to Messiah. Well, notice that Isaiah does not say that Messiah is about to be born. They don't know how long it will be before Messiah comes at that point. But he doesn't say a Messiah is about to be born. Instead, he simply uses the life of the promised Messiah as a kind of measuring stick for Ahaz's time. He says the time between Messiah's birth and when He comes to the age of discernment, regardless of when He may be born, that is the time that you have to worry about these two kings - "before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good".

What does that mean? Well, it could refer to the age of moral discretion, when a child becomes basically able to distinguish good and evil - a couple of years, in other words. It's interesting that two years after this prophecy in Isaiah 7, two years later, Assyrian invaded Syria and Israel and left them both weak. So, it could be referring to that. Or it could be referring, not to the age when a child basically comes to understand right and wrong, but instead the age of accountability - the legal accountability - which came in Israel at about 13 years of age. Well, if you fast forward 13 years from Isaiah 7, it **was about** 722, when both Syria and Israel were absolutely demolished. Either way, listen carefully, Judah's current problems are relatively short-lived. God Himself will rescue Israel from their temporal problems. And God is using the

growth cycle of the promised Messiah to assure Ahaz that He will rescue Judah from physical harm in a very short time.

What was Ahaz's response to God's promise of physical rescue? You remember last week? He says, *"I don't need Isaiah. I don't need Yahweh. I've got a plan. I'm going to call Assyria to help me."* Instead of seeking God, he looks to Assyria. If you're familiar with the Old Testament, you know that often when the kings of Israel found themselves threatened by surrounding countries, they took matters into their own hands. And instead of seeking God, they looked for help in all the wrong places. Typically, they would make these political and military alliances with the nations of Egypt and Assyria - the powerful countries around them - hoping that they would rescue them. And God constantly rebukes them for that response. Look at Isaiah 31. Isaiah 31:1: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help / And rely on horses, / And trust in chariots because they are many / And in horsemen because they are very strong, / But they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord! / Yet He also is wise and will bring disaster / And does not retract His words, / But will arise against the house of evildoers / And against the help of the workers of iniquity. / Now the Egyptians are men and not God, / And their horses are flesh and not spirit; / So the Lord will stretch out His hand, / And he who helps will stumble / And he who is helped will fall, / And all of them will come to an end together." This was true both as a nation and as individuals. People would respond to trouble like this.

The most powerful example, I think, in all the Old Testament is in 2 Chronicles 16. Turn there for a moment. 2 Chronicles 16:7. 2 Chronicles 16:7: "At that time Hanani the seer [or the prophet] came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, 'Because you have relied on the king of Aram [that is, Syria] and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Aram has escaped out of your hand.'" And then he gives them an example. He says, "Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand." And I love verse 9: "'For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You [Asa] have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.'" Then Asa was angry with the seer [prophet] and put him in prison, for he

was enraged at him for this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time.” Look at verse 12. It gets personal as well. “In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet [we don’t know what the problem was, but the writer goes on to say that]. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians.” Now, don’t misunderstand what God is saying here. He’s not saying that if you seek Him in the time of your trouble, that you will always be healed and always brought out of your trouble, nor is He saying that you shouldn’t go to the doctors and the physicians. What He’s saying is, “*Where is your trust? Where is your reliance in the midst of trouble? Who do you seek primarily for help? When you find yourself in trouble, where do you lean? Where do you go? Where’s your trust? What do you put your confidence in, in this life? Do you have your own Egypt? Do you have your own Assyria to which you run for help when trouble comes? Maybe your money, your intelligence, the plans you’ve made, the skills you have? You fill in the blank. What’s your Egypt? What’s your Assyria? Where do you run when you find yourself in trouble?*” Instead, we are to rely on God. Our mind - whatever wisdom we may use to try **to** deal wisely with our situation, we must not rely on that. We must, **instead**, seek God and rely on Him and Him alone. The sign in Isaiah’s time pointed to the truth that Yahweh alone can rescue us, even from the physical dangers of this life, even as He promised Ahaz He would rescue him from the siege that was coming.

The final truth that the sign of the divine human Messiah points to is that Yahweh will accomplish spiritual salvation in a person who will come. Yahweh will accomplish spiritual salvation in a person who will come. This too is a dominant theme of the Book of Isaiah. In chapters 7 through 12, this person is identified who will accomplish this deliverance - this salvation. Verse 14, we’re looking at, a son will be born, a son called Immanuel. Immanuel - God Himself, God among us, God Himself will enter human history, enter the womb of a virgin, and take on human nature. In chapter 9 - that famous prophecy of chapter 9 - a son is born, and He is a king. In chapter 11, He is a king who reigns. In chapter 12 we find the end of the book of Immanuel, as it’s called - the prophecies about the coming one. And it ends with a prophecy, in chapter 12, of what the redeemed will sing as a result of the work of Immanuel. And it’s a song about salvation - “**with** joy will we draw water out of the wells of salvation”, the writer writes. Immanuel, the one who’s coming, will not only be a king but He will be a savior.

In Isaiah 40 - that famous passage that's quoted often in the New Testament - we find that the Lord Himself will come and before He comes, there will be a prophet that will come before Him announcing His way, a voice crying in the wilderness, "Clear [prepare] the way for the Lord [the Lord is coming] ..." In Isaiah 42:1-9, we have a brief description of the ministry of the Messiah when He comes.

But these statements about Messiah are not unique to Isaiah. All Old Testament believers found their hope in this person who would come to bring salvation. If you go all the way back to Genesis 3:15 (just Adam and Eve alive) God, in the person of the second person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in pre-incarnate form, comes down and slays an animal, representing His own coming death. And He says to Adam and Eve... At that point, He says, "*There's coming a seed of the woman. And the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. He who comes will deal with your sin problem.*" And from that point forward, God's people anticipated the person who would come. Jesus said that Abraham looked for that person who would come. Jesus said in John 8, "*Abraham saw my day - looked for My day. He saw it and was glad. He saw it by faith.*" Hebrews 11 tells us Moses got it: "[Moses chose to forsake Egypt] considering the reproach of Christ [the Messiah] greater riches than the treasures of Egypt..." **Moses** made a life decision to forsake all that he had in Egypt including **possibly** becoming Pharaoh because of his love for the Messiah. In Acts 2, we're told that David looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah. The Old Testament saints looked for this. They looked for this person who would come.

One of my favorites is Simeon. Simeon - we'll look at that passage at some point in the future and study in detail, I'm sure - but Simeon, an Old Testament saint who was looking for the coming of the Messiah. And in Luke 2, when Mary and Joseph come back to the temple, he finds them and he holds **the** child and he says, "*This is God's salvation in this person.*" He understood that the Messiah would bring salvation. He goes on to say, "*For both Jew and Gentile.*" He even understood that the Messiah would suffer because he told Mary that a sword will pierce your own heart. Amazing insight! So, a divine human Messiah, one who would accomplish salvation, was the hope of all Old Testament believers.

But how exactly would this child bring about spiritual salvation? How would God accomplish our salvation through a divine human Messiah? How would He effect our spiritual rescue through Immanuel? Well, the answer shouts back at us, for time and eternity, from Isaiah 53. Later in his own prophecy, Isaiah tells us how. Turn to Isaiah 53. Notice what he says. He says, “*Our hope is found in this servant of Yahweh, in this child who will also be a king. Our hope is found in His substitutionary death for sinners.*” Isaiah 53:4: “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, / And our sorrows He carried; / Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, / Smitten of God, and afflicted.” In other words, we thought He was getting what He deserved. That isn’t true. Verse 5 says He wasn’t smitten by God for His own sins - “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, / He was crushed for our iniquities; / The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, / And by His scourging we are healed.” Verse 6 [listen to this indictment of all of us]: “All of us like sheep have gone astray [Isaiah says], / Each of us has turned to his own way; / But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all / To fall on Him [this one].” Verse 10 tells us what God did: “But the Lord was pleased / To crush Him [Yahweh was pleased to crush the Messiah], putting Him to grief; / If He would render Himself as a guilt offering [sacrifice]...” Verse 11 tells us that more was going on there than physical suffering: “the anguish of His soul” - as He endured the wrath of God for us. “By His knowledge [by our knowledge of Him] the Righteous One, / My Servant, will justify the many...” By His righteous life, I can become righteous. I can be declared right with God.

Why does God tell Ahaz about a divine Messiah who will mediate salvation to sinners? Because it is exactly what Ahaz needed to hear. It was the only way he could gain hope before God. It’s the same way for sinners today. But it wasn’t just for sinners, it was also for the true believers. In Israel, **at that time** when there was a wicked idolator sitting on Judah’s throne, they needed to know that the Messiah was coming, that “remnant” as Isaiah calls them, that small group, had put their trust and hope in the Messiah. They were waiting for Him to come and to accomplish their salvation. And Isaiah says, “*He’s coming!*”

Let me ask you at this Christmas season, as we celebrate our Lord’s birth, are you part of the remnant? Are you part of the few who have been willing to turn from your rebellion against God, from your own way, and bow before the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ? Is your hope in

the Messiah and in Jesus Christ alone? Are you leaning completely on Him? Does the prophecy He fulfilled in His birth strengthen your faith that our God is the one and only true God? Do you understand that God's sending of Christ proves Him to be the sovereign of history, working out His own redemptive plan? Do you understand that this sign points to the reality that only in God is found physical deliverance, even in this life? Where do you turn when you're in trouble? Where do you look for help? You go to Egypt? You go to Assyria? You go to some substitute? And is your confidence in Jesus Christ alone as your only hope of spiritual salvation? Is your only hope in His righteousness and not your own? Is your hope in His death as your substitute? Those are the lessons that God was teaching Ahaz and us in the miraculous sign.

Listen, as you celebrate Christmas this week, remind yourself that God, our God, the only living and true God, is by nature a savior, and that He will save all of those who will turn from their rebellion and seek Him? How do we know that? How do we know that God will respond to us like that? Because He gave us, for all time, an unmistakable, unforgettable sign: a virgin will be with child and bear a son and she will call His name "God among us".

Let's pray together.

Father how can we ever thank You for such incredible grace? Father, we thank You for what You revealed Ahaz and, through him, to us about Yourself - that You are the one, the only, the living and true God, that all the gods of the nations are idols, that You declare the end from the beginning. You have a plan, and You work it out. Father thank You that You are the sovereign over history, working out Your great redemptive plan that includes us. And nothing can stand in Your way - not the sins of a Jeconiah, not the obstacle of a virgin needing to bear a son. What You have promised, You will complete. Father thank You that You are also the source of our physical deliverance in this life. Help us when we find ourselves in trouble, not to look around us for help, not to scheme and plan and manipulate, but to turn, and seek You, and rely on You alone. And Father thank You, most of all, that in this child You promised, You accomplished the great work of redemption - that You treated Him on the cross as we deserve to be treated, as our substitute, receiving Your just wrath against our sins, so that forever You could treat us as

Christ deserves to be treated. Father, we thank You for such grace. Help us in this season to celebrate Christ - a sign, a sign of Your grace. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen!