

2014\_12\_03 Midweek Advent 1  
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
Pastor David Pfeiffer

Midweek Advent Series:  
**WHAT CHILD IS THIS?**

*Isaiah Foretells A King*

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| 1. A King Who Is “God with Us” – Isaiah 7:14      | (12/3)  |
| 2. A King Who Rules with Justice – Isaiah 9:6-7   | (12/10) |
| 3. A King Who Is Righteous – Isaiah 11:5          | (12/17) |
| 4. A King Who Accomplishes Peace – Isaiah 11:6-16 | (12/25) |

**1. A King Who Is “God with Us”**

Isaiah 7:14

(for context, read 7:1–16 and 2 Kings 16)

INI

**Isaiah 7:14**

*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign:  
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son,  
and shall call His name Immanuel.*

God’s peace and good will to you who labor here on earth, in the grace of God which has appeared in His Son, which brings salvation to you, and which teaches you to look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

What will become of this child? Most of us have had some experience with the birth of a child – a son or daughter, a baby sister or brother, a grandson or granddaughter. That child is so small, so helpless, so vulnerable, and yet so full of opportunity. It wasn’t too long ago, just last April, when Adam was born into our family. We watch him day by day, month by month, learn new things, discover the world around him, and begin to show forth his unique characteristics. And in a family where there are more than one child, you know how each one is unique. No two children are the same. They each develop their own personalities, their own likes and dislikes, their own ways of thinking and learning. And so when a baby is born, we are left wondering, what will this child become?

Yes, "What Child is This?" The title comes from the familiar Christmas hymn in the Worship Supplement. It asks the probing question: "What child is this who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping?" This is the question that hangs in the air that Christmas night when God brought light. It was the question hanging in the air for a century, for ten centuries, for the life of the world this question was hanging in the air, up to that moment where angels greeted us on a field in Bethlehem with the answer: "This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sin. Haste, Haste to bring Him laud, the babe, the Son of Mary!"

This Advent season we dig deeper into that question which hangs in the air. We travel back to the time of the prophet Isaiah to hear the words which foretell a King who is coming. We visit a people estranged, lost, in darkness. We go to a time in the history of God's people when they sit in darkness, when they have forsaken God's ways; a time where the kingdom had been corrupted by corrupt kings, and the people await the impending judgment that God had promised to bring upon them if they did not repent.

This is Christmas through the eyes of Isaiah, a Christmas devoid of jingle bells; a Christmas which rings a solemn and sad tone for Israel. And yet, also a Christmas which promises light, which evokes hope, which prepares us for the coming of a King, even as we anticipate the return of our King on Judgment day. And so this Advent season, we will take a look into three of Isaiah's prophecies. What will He become? What new things will He learn and discover? What will make Him unique among all other kings and people? Isaiah digs deeply into the question we ask: "What Child is This?"

We begin today in chapter 7 of Isaiah. The year is 735 B.C., 7 centuries before Jesus was born. The king of Judah is named Ahaz. And the prophet who meets the king at the upper pool just outside the walls of Jerusalem is Isaiah.

"Ask a sign!" Ask it either in the depth of the grave or in the height of the heavens. Only, ask and it will be given you. It was a decisive moment for King Ahaz of Judah. Would he commit himself and the future of his kingdom to the LORD? Or would he find another source of refuge? The enemies are knocking at the door. Would King Ahaz fulfill his royal calling as God's own chosen, anointed son, by trusting in the LORD against all odds, or would he look for salvation elsewhere? The prophet Isaiah brings a command from the LORD: "Ask a sign!"

The enemies are knocking at the door and Ahaz is desperate. He is walled up in Jerusalem, with little to no options left. And as he makes his way to the upper pool to check the water supply, Isaiah meets him with an ultimatum from the LORD. “Do not be afraid, for the LORD will not let Syria or Israel overtake you. Only believe and you will stand. Only ask a sign of the LORD that He may prove Himself to you, that you may believe and fulfill your royal calling.”

But he would ask no sign. He merely made up an excuse, saying he did not want to test the LORD by asking a sign. But when the Lord has placed His promise in a sign, it is for your sake, an act of grace and revelation. To reject this is to reject the LORD altogether. This was the decisive moment for the kingdom of Judah, the one to whom had been given the promises. This was the decisive moment for the house of David, to whom had been promised the everlasting kingdom, the kingdom of Christ, from whom would come forth the Seed to conquer all enemies, and establish God’s everlasting kingdom for Israel. But Ahaz will not ask a sign.

Ahaz looked for refuge elsewhere. Rather than trusting in the LORD to protect him, he turned to his political ingenuity and set up a meeting with the king of Assyria. 2 Kings 16 describes how he submitted to King Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Assyria, offering silver and gold.

The Assyrians were most powerful and ruthless kingdoms in the world at that time. Their military tactics were known for their brutality. And their king, Tiglath-Pileser, had turned his sights toward the riches of Egypt. But to get there, he would have to go through Syria, Israel, and Judah – the three nations that sat between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean sea on the path to Egypt. So Ahaz attempts to form an alliance with a foreign king, with foreign gods.

And he says, “I am your servant and your son.” In these words, the kingdom was doomed. King TP III would not keep his end of the alliance; instead, he would eventually bring Judah to their knees in destruction. Enemies were knocking at the door, and Ahaz looked for a sign, a hope, a salvation elsewhere than where the LORD had promised it. He looked to other nations and gods and kingdoms for his refuge.

The point is, when enemies come knocking on the door, don’t open it. Don’t cut a deal with them. Sure for us its not kings and nations that press upon us, that entice us into alliance. But there are other enemies.

Maybe its greed. The love of “stuff” comes knocking at the door, asking your allegiance. Christmas comes with all its ads, with all its stuff and greed knocks at the

door, saying, “What the LORD has promised you is not enough. His sign and word will not keep you happy. You need me. You need me to make you happy. I can offer you the world – do you like eating out at the finest restaurant? Its yours. Do you like to have the latest in name-brand clothing, the newest shoes, the newest technology? Do you like toys? Do you like having the biggest TV? A boat? A cabin? You name it – just let me in.”

Maybe its those desperate moments; those moments where desperation knocks at the door. Times are tough and we’re looking for a way out. Desperation comes saying, just cut corners a little on your taxes; just be a little dishonest with your spouse; just trust your instincts; what the Lord has promised you is not enough. Just let me in.”

The enemies came knocking and Ahaz tried to make a deal with them. Ahaz looked for salvation elsewhere than where the LORD had promised it.

So Isaiah responds in rebuke, saying,

*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign:  
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*

This sign was both a sign of judgment and a sign of salvation.

It was a sign of judgment in that it would only come after the kingdom and the royal dynasty had been brought to ruins. The verses that follow reveal that this coming Child would not be born until after the king of Assyria had finished God’s purpose. It says in v.17, “The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father’s house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.”

This would be the sign. The Child would come at a time when the kingdom of Judah had been utterly ravished. The royal lineage of David would be broken, and kings from other nations would exercise their rule over Judah. The Assyrians would lay siege to the land, and not long after, the Babylonians would invade. In 586 B.C., Jerusalem would fall and the land would never again know the presence of the Lord’s rule as in the days of David. That is until a Child would come.

Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a Son, Isaiah says. He will eat butter and honey, but no bread. This signifies poverty. The child who comes will eat curds and honey. He will be born of the poverty in Israel. In a land that is desolate, forsaken by

God. As it says in chapter 53, He will grow up as a tender sprout out of dry ground. Jesus will come as king at a time when the land has been deserted by God.

Jesus would come in all lowliness, taking the form of a slave, a servant of kings, on trial before kings, and subject to the curse of our sins. He would be born of a human mother, an unmarried virgin in her youth. The word used for virgin emphasizes the fact that this young lady will not be married; she will not have known a man. So there was no human father. Instead, the LORD Himself will give the sign. The lineage of David would be carried on by God Himself, conceiving His own King in the womb of a virgin.

In this, it is a sign of judgment against unbelieving Ahaz and his people. It was proof that the rule of the kings of Judah had utterly failed and Ahaz had turned to the rule of other kings, spelling the doom of him and his people.

But a Child will be born. As Matthew records,

*Matthew 1:22–23 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”*

And His name will be a sign of salvation: Immanuel. God with us. The sign of judgment to Ahaz who does not believe becomes a sign of salvation to those who believe. For the one born of a virgin, is God’s own Son. He will have no sinful Father and will carry no sinful flesh, but will be pure, of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit. He is Immanuel. He is God among us and with us in the flesh.

So God Himself would give the sign. And God Himself would be the sign. And God Himself would fulfill all that Ahaz had failed to do. King Ahaz was us without God; but this King is God with us.

Ahaz is us without God, Jesus is God with us.

Ahaz is us without God – trusting in ourselves for refuge against the evils that threaten us,

Jesus is God with us – trusting in His Father for every need, and conquering the evils that threaten him by keeping God’s commandments perfectly.

Ahaz is us without God – making an alliance with sin,  
Jesus is God with us –waging war against sin.

Ahaz is us without God dying in our own sins and facing eternal doom,  
Jesus is God with us, dying for our sins and bringing us eternal life.

Ahaz is us without God, hopelessly lost, without a place to stand,  
Jesus is God with us, finding us, saving us, and establishing us by faith in the promise  
of everlasting life.

It is a sign of salvation for all who believe. As the hymn writer William Dix puts it:

*Nails, spear shall pierce Him through;  
The cross He'll bear for me, for me, for you.  
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe the Son of Mary. WS 712:2*

What will become of this child? We've begun to see Christmas through the eyes of Isaiah. The child is so small, so helpless, so vulnerable, and yet so full of opportunity. It wasn't so long ago when Israel and Judah were so helpless, and trusting in themselves, fell to the judgment of unbelief. And it wasn't so long ago that out of the darkness God brought forth opportunity, a first born Son, born of a virgin, and she wrapped Him in swaddling cloths – our King, Immanuel.

Every child is unique – but this Child is truly unique, for unlike any other sinful baby, born of a sinful human father, this baby was God Himself, conceived of the Holy Spirit, hidden in human skin, hidden in a barn in Bethlehem. What will become of Him? So we look forward to next week, when we will see through the eyes of Isaiah, how this child will rule in His kingdom. What Child is this? This, this is Christ our King – Immanuel, God with us.