

December 4, 2019

Advent I

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

## **Isaiah Sees the Savior: The Savior's Birth**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How far can you see without any vision correction. If your eyes work like mine, you would not be able to see much past your nose. Everything gets blurry after that. But with glasses, those blurry objects become clear. If the object is large enough we can see objects that are light-years away. The star we often call the north star is hundreds of light-years away from the earth. One light year is about 5.88 trillion miles. We can see large objects that emit great amount of light from a distance that is difficult to understand. Using optical technology like telescopes, we can see the stars and planets that are beyond the heavenly bodies we can see with only our eyes.

Though we can see great distances using our eyes and our minds to develop technology, we cannot see very far into time. We try to predict the future of the weather and have gotten much better but our predictions are still not very good when you get out a few days or weeks. Businesses will try to predict the future so they can be ready for whatever conditions may exist in 5 or 10 years. But that is becoming increasingly difficult since the economy changes more rapidly now than ever before. We could take a good guess at what our life will be like one year from today. Maybe we get it right and maybe something is completely different. We simply do not have the ability to see the future.

Isaiah was given corrective vision from the Lord to see the future. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Isaiah saw the Savior. During our Wednesday Advent services we go back in time to see the Savior as Isaiah saw him. Tonight we see the Savior's birth through the eyes of Isaiah. Next week we will see the Savior's name and finally we will see the Savior's work. Listen to Isaiah predict the Savior's birth in...

### **Isaiah 7:14 (NIV84)**

*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.*

### **A Sign**

A little context is necessary to understand who the Lord is talking to through Isaiah and what this sign is all about. Isaiah served as a prophet in the time of the divided kingdom. The northern tribes were called Israel and the southern tribes were called Judah. Isaiah was in Judah. Now, the people of Judah and of Israel were all Jews. They were cousins to one degree or another. However, as it sometimes happens in families, there was strife. The king of Israel made an agreement with the king of Aram, a Gentile kingdom, to attack Judah and take over the land. The king of Judah at this time was named Ahaz. The people of Judah and Ahaz were understandably concerned that team of Israel and Aram might defeat them.

King Ahaz had a plan to save his kingdom. He would call on the king of Assyria to help him. This is a really bad idea. Assyria was much stronger than any of the three involved in the fight. If Assyria showed up to help Judah, would they be content just to defeat Israel and Aram and go home? Not likely. In fact Assyria did attack Israel while Ahaz was king of Judah. Assyria completely destroyed Israel and

deported its people in 722 B.C. The people of Israel would not return again. But Assyria decided that Judah was a nice target too and attacked, destroying many towns and cities. Only Jerusalem was spared. Calling on Assyria for help was a bad idea. Ahaz should have called on the Lord.

That is why the Lord sent Isaiah to Ahaz. Isaiah told Ahaz that the Lord would protect Judah. Isaiah told him that Israel and Aram would not defeat Judah but would themselves be defeated. And then the Lord told Ahaz to ask for a sign so that he would be certain that this promise of protection was from the Lord and would come true. Unbelieving Ahaz refused to ask the Lord for a sign. So the Lord unilaterally gave Ahaz a sign. *The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

This sign told Ahaz that the Lord would save Judah from its immediate enemies. However, this sign especially pointed seven hundred years into the future. This is a sign for all people that the Lord would save us from our spiritual enemies, from sin, death and the devil. This sign, this promise of the birth of Immanuel gave Isaiah and the believers hope. This promise told them that the Lord had not abandoned his people. He was still going to send a Savior for them and for all people. The promise of Immanuel's birth showed that the Lord loved his people.

Isaiah saw the birth of Christ many years before it happened. We see the Savior's birth many years after it happened but it is still a sign for us. For when we see that God kept his promise to Isaiah and to the entire human race, we know the Lord has not abandoned us. When we look upon the Christ Child in the manger in the readings and songs of these weeks in Advent, we see that the Lord loves his people. Like Ahaz, we did not ask for such a sign, but our gracious Lord wanted us to be sure of his promises, sure of his love, sure that he will never forsake us.

Our Lord knows that in our sinful human nature we look for signs of God's love in the wrong places. We look for outward signs that God is with us. Are we able to get what we want for our family this Christmas? Is everyone healthy? What is my job situation? How are my grades? How many friends do I have? What does the bank account look like? Do I feel happy? When we look for a sign of God's love for us by looking at our emotional, spiritual, physical, financial, mental or social health, we will always be uncertain. Look to the birth of Jesus. God's sign that he will and has saved you is delivered to you by the Child Mary delivered on the first Christmas.

### **Born of a Virgin**

*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

Isaiah sees two unique characteristics of the Savior's birth. He is born of a virgin and he is Immanuel. Both are good news for us sinners.

Skeptics are quick to point out that the word Isaiah uses for virgin could also be translated as young woman. In fact, some English translations do just that. The skeptics don't want us to believe that Christ was born of a virgin because that is just not how things work in this world. It is not biologically possible for a baby to be conceived and born without a father. But we can be 100% certain that Isaiah did not mean young woman, but meant virgin. How can we be sure? Because God himself interprets this for us in the Gospel of Matthew, the account of Christmas we read tonight. The word used by Matthew only means a woman who has never been with a man, as Matthew made very clear in his telling of the birth of our Savior.

Why is this such good news for us sinners? The virgin birth of Christ means that he is born without original sin. A common comment when seeing a newborn baby is, "He is perfect. She is perfect." But every child born is a spiritually dead, blind, enemy of God. They look perfect and innocent but wait until they are two! Not so with the baby placed in a manger so long ago in Bethlehem. He is actually perfect. He is truly without sin. For he was not born in the image of sinful man, but was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Our Savior has no sin to stop him from rescuing us from our sin.

In addition to being perfect, Jesus is also one of us. He is born of a woman just like you were. He is a true human being. He has flesh that will be bruised and pierced upon the cross in the place of sinners. He has blood that will be shed to redeem us from sin and eternal death. It is good news that Jesus was born of a woman for now we have a Savior who can do what is necessary to save us. He can die in our place as the innocence Lamb of God to give us life and forgiveness.

Isaiah sees even more about the birth of the Savior. This child will be Immanuel, God with us. Jesus is not only a human, but is at the same time true God. The Lord does not send someone to be a savior who might accomplish the goal. He sends his one and only Son, true God, to ensure that we sinners will be saved. What hope and confidence this must have given to Isaiah and the believers in Judah! What hope and confidence the birth of God's Son gives to us. He really did rescue me.

And Immanuel is still "God With Us" today. Whatever happens in our life, God is with us in Christ. Whatever we have done, God is with us in Christ. Whatever the world may do to us, God is with us in Christ.

Isaiah could only look ahead to the future and see the birth of the Savior. We rejoice to look back to the birth of Immanuel. But in looking back, we also see into the future. For Christ has given us a certain future in which he will continue to be with us now and we will be with him for eternity. This one verse of Isaiah is such good news! It is not a surprise that many of our Christmas hymns use the imagery of Isaiah 7:14. We close our meditation with the prayer of the final verse of "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin And enter in; Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels The great glad tidings tell;  
Oh, come to us, Abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel!*  
(CW 65:4)

Amen.