

Christmas Eve - 2009

Sermon Text: Isaiah 7:10-14

Theme: *“Show me the sign!”*

Grace, peace and mercy to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The time of waiting draws to a close as this evening we remember and celebrate the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Do you celebrate this evening when you return home, or do you wait in expectation for what tomorrow brings?

Regardless of when we celebrate the coming of the Christ child, we remember two things: 1) It is the birth of our Saviour we celebrate; and 2) we still have to deal with the challenges we face each and everyday.

In fact for many people, Christmas merely adds to the challenge as we try to fit in family, work and social events into our already busy lives. For many there is the added financial pressure to provide the things, the gifts we think we should. Even though we wrap our faces in beautiful Christmas smiles, we still have to deal with the challenges presented to us.

King Ahaz was a man who knew about dealing with pressures and challenges. The kings Rezin and Pekah of the kingdoms to the north of Judah had formed an alliance and they were marching against Ahaz and the city of Jerusalem. Surely there would have been great pressure from the these kings and indeed from the Judeans to come up with a good solution. The northern kings would have wanted him to give in to their demands, and his people would have wanted lives saved and to remain in the land God had promised to them. What a dilemma.

Into this pressure situation God says to Ahaz through His prophet Isaiah, “It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.” The attacks of these kingdoms will fail because they are led by men. Jerusalem will stand because its power and strength comes from God himself.

Now to encourage Ahaz and to reassure the people of Jerusalem, God invites Ahaz to ask for a sign, any sign. In fact whether this sign be from the depths of hell or from the heights of heaven itself, it would not be too much to ask. This invitation stands in stark contrast to the devil’s temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. The devil’s promises are always false and ultimately he doesn’t have the power to satisfy what we need. God on the other hand, the creator of the universe has the power to grant any sign that Ahaz requests. This is an invitation to prayer like no other.

But poor Ahaz doubts God. Stacked up against what he sees before him, Ahaz would rather put his trust in his own diplomacy and politics. So in a show of false piety, Ahaz said he would not ask, he would not put God to the test. You see if God had provided the requested sign, it would have tied Ahaz’ hands to trust in God alone. The people would have seen the sign and it would mean the end of negotiations. If a sign was provided and Jerusalem was overthrown, it would mean the end of Ahaz’ power and rule. So Ahaz ignored God’s invitation and he chose his own path. Ahaz trusted himself more than he trusted God so he asked for no sign.

So with almost a sense of humour God asks whether Ahaz has had enough of trying the patience of people that he also has to try the patience of God. What are words and negotiations and man-made treaties compared to the power and reign of God?

We might consider what are the world events that are pressing upon us this Christmas? What are our international efforts focussed on most of all? What are we as people trying to solve by our own power? Surely there can be nothing greater than climate change in our collective minds. Perhaps a sign for us today is that all our collective political power, ideals and posturing have produced little or no change. As God’s people, we surely have to turn back to him to lead us in this and indeed in all our daily concerns and challenges.

Turning back to Ahaz and his problems, God realises that if Ahaz, the king of God’s people won’t ask for a sign, God himself will provide one. “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call him Immanuel.” Not in Ahaz’ own time, not before the people of Jerusalem will

be led into exile, but in God's own time he sent the sign that points to his perfect solution to the underlying problem of all humanity throughout the ages. God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to be born of the Virgin Mary. This is the sign that God's plan of salvation is being enacted through the person of Jesus.

God's perfect plan enacted in and through Jesus puts an end to all our plans to solve our own problems. This Divine solution makes all other plans of humanity obsolete. The child foretold by the prophet Isaiah will be called Immanuel which means 'God with us'. Jesus is truly God and truly human and he dwells in our midst. God is not remote and absent. He is in our midst, coming on that first Christmas Eve and still coming to us today through his Word and through his Body and Blood in the Holy Sacrament.

This Christmas as we celebrate once more the coming of Christ, let's turn our hearts towards him and listen to his message, his promise of salvation for us and for all people. And as we unwrap the presents we exchange with our family and friends, let us not forget the greatest present which was God's gift to all people. We look back to Jesus, born as a baby, and we look forward to Jesus coming again in glory.

God bless you with his presence this Christmas.

Amen.