

Order of Worship for December 18, 2022

(Use 12-16-18 for powerpoint of DS III)

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: (Needs introduction) *“Lift Up Your Heads, You Everlasting Doors”* –
Hymn #339

Confession and Forgiveness p.184

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm

P: The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof,

C: the world and those who dwell therein,

P: for He has founded it upon the seas

C: and established upon the rivers.

P: Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?

C: And who shall stand in His holy place?

P: He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

C: who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

P: He will receive blessing from the LORD

C: and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

P: Such is the generation of those who seek Him,

C: who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

P: Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors,

C: that the King of glory may come in.

P: Who is this King of glory?

C: The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!

P: Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors,

C: that the King of glory may come in.

P: Who is this King of glory?

C: The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory!

Gloria Patri (*Glory be to the Father*) p. 186

Kyrie (*Lord, Have Mercy*) p. 186

Hymn of Praise: *“Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates”* –**Hymn #341, vs. 1 and 5**

Salutation and Prayer of the Day: pg. 189

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And with Thy Spirit.

P: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen

Old Testament Lesson--Isaiah 7:10-17

R: Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? 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. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

R: This is the Word of the Lord

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson--Romans 1:1-7

R: Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to His human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Him and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

R: This is Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Alleluia and Verse p. 190 (first version)

The Holy Gospel--Matthew 1:18-25

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew the first chapter

C: Glory be to Thee, O Lord (sung)

P: This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel"—which

means, "God with us." When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to Thee, O Christ. (sung)

Nicene Creed p. 191

Sermon Hymn: *"Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord"* – **Hymn #352**

Sermon: *"A Sign from God"* - **Isaiah 7:10-17**

Perhaps some of you remember from the news a few years ago that a Christian group bought a bunch of billboards throughout the country. On them, they put different sayings from God, such as "Meet at my place before the game." I also remember seeing a billboard in Gary as I drove home from college. It was an advertisement for the diocese of Gary, and it read "Consider the priesthood: If you're waiting for a sign from God, this is it."

We all look for signs from God. We look for signs that we are in the right career, that we are marrying the right person, that we're making the right decision about any number of choices that face us each day. We also look for signs from God to prove that He exists, or that he cares for us. When we reach the end of our rope, when troubles seem to overwhelm us, we ask God for a sign. Where is the healing? Where is the rescue? Where is the end of my troubles?

Sometimes we can be jealous of the people we read about in the Bible. They get to hear from God. They don't have to stumble around and wonder what to do. They get signs, in dreams or burning bushes or other ways. But sometimes the signs aren't what they want. Sometimes the signs are not signs of hope and joy, but of judgment.

That's what we see when we look at this familiar Old Testament lesson. Because of how Matthew uses it in the passage from his Gospel we heard read this morning, we often just see this passage, this prophecy, as a sign of the coming Messiah, a sign of God's mighty work of salvation, a good sign from God. We see it as predicting Jesus' birth. But there's more going on than that.

First, we have to know who is talking here. Isaiah the prophet we know, but his ministry spans four kings of Judah. King Ahaz, though, is not one of the good ones. Ahaz was one of the worst kings ever to ascend David's throne. Not only did he worship false gods and offer sacrifices to idols, but Ahaz even sacrificed some of his own sons to pagan gods. There was bad, and then there was Ahaz bad.

And so when Ahaz, king of the southern kingdom of Judah, hears that the kings of Syria and of the northern kingdom of Israel are massing forces against him, he doesn't turn to God. Or at least, he doesn't just turn to God. He consults oracles and idols. And he doesn't just look for

help from gods. He planned to send for help from the king of Assyria, the rising superpower in the ancient Near East.

But even if Ahaz doesn't care for God, God still cares for Ahaz and the people of Judah. So God sends Isaiah to Ahaz, with the promise that the plans of Syria and Israel would not stand or come to pass (Isaiah 7:7). To prove it, God has Isaiah tell Ahaz to ask him for a sign, a way to confirm his Word was true. Ahaz refused. "I shall not ask, and I shall not put God to the test," said Ahaz (Isaiah 7:12).

Now, at first glance, this seems like a good thing. After all, we read in Deuteronomy, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test," though we're probably more familiar with it from when Jesus quotes it to rebuke the devil during the temptation in the wilderness. But Ahaz wasn't refusing the sign so he didn't put God to the test. He didn't want anything from God. He didn't want a sign from God. He wanted to go his own way, forge his own path, without God getting in his way.

Ahaz's response leaves Isaiah furious. He roared at Ahaz, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? 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. (Isaiah 7:13-14). (Immanuel means, "God with us.") Before the boy would be old enough to know the difference between good and evil, the kings of Syria and Israel would be gone. Good news, right? Wrong! Isaiah continued: "The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house days which have not come since the day when Ephraim went away from Judah—the king of Assyria." Syria and Israel would be off the scene, conquered by Assyria. But Assyria wouldn't stop there. The Assyrians would turn their eyes towards Judah and Ahaz. Thus the sign of Immanuel, the proof that God was with Ahaz, would be for him a sign of judgment and destruction.

This is what the sign of Immanuel means for us: salvation. The angel told Joseph that Jesus came to "save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). God became a human being in the flesh of Jesus Christ so he could save us from our sins. Jesus did this for you when he died on the cross, bearing your sins in his body to the point of death. He came to suffer and die for you, enduring God's judgment and fierce anger, so that you wouldn't have to. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). The sign of Immanuel is salvation for all who believe in Jesus and the forgiveness he won for us on the cross.

That is the thing about signs: how you read them depends on who you are. For Ahaz, the sign of Immanuel was a sign of judgment. For Matthew, Joseph, Mary, you, and me, the sign of Immanuel is a sign of salvation. So for those who believe in Christ and his forgiveness, God's signs are always signs of grace and mercy. But for those who do not believe, God's signs are always signs of judgment. Who you are affects how you read the signs.

For us, the sign of Immanuel is a sign of hope. Yet now we remember that God's sign of judgment is not the end. Even Ahaz, who was a bad king, is still listed when Matthew begins

his Gospel with a genealogy that goes from Abraham to Joseph, who had the dream and listened to the angel and was the earthly father of the Son of God. God's judgment comes not for its own sake, but to call to repentance.

We still wait for a sign from God. What will the sign of Immanuel mean to you when Christ returns or calls you home? Will the fact that "God is with us" be a threat or a promise? Will Immanuel come to punish or to rescue you? How you read the sign depends on who you are. I leave you with these words from the Book of Revelation: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." This is the sign of Immanuel: God with us, God for us, God forgiving us in the flesh of Jesus Christ forever.

Offering-Voluntary

Offertory (*Create in Me*) p. 192

Prayer of the Church

P: Lord in Your mercy . . .

C: hear our prayer.

Service of the Sacrament

Preface: p. 194

P: It is truly good, right, and proper that we should in all times and in all places give thanks to You, almighty God, heavenly Father, for You kept Your promise to Isaiah to send "Immanuel," God with us, in Your Son, Christ Jesus, who birth You told Joseph to accept. Through Jesus You brought about salvation for all of us. Therefore with angels and all the army of heaven we praise and make great Your holy name, evermore praising You and singing . . .

Sanctus:(*Holy, Holy Holy*) p. 195

Lord's Prayer, The Words of Our Lord and Pax Domini: (*Peace of the Lord*) p. 196-7

Agnus Dei: (*Lamb of God*) p. 198

Distribution Hymns:

"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates" – **Hymn #341, vs. 2-4**

Dismissal: (pastor)

Nunc Dimittis: (*Song of Simeon*) p.199

Thanksgiving: p. 200

Prayer after Communion: p. 201

P: Gracious God, our heavenly Father, You have given us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper of Your Son's body and blood. Keep us firm in the true faith throughout the days of our journey here on earth, that on the day of His coming, we may, together with all Your saints, celebrate the marriage feast of Jesus with His bride, the Church. In His name we pray;

C: Amen. (sung)

Benedicamus ("*Let Us Bless*") **and Blessing:** p. 201

Closing Hymn: "*What Hope! An Eden Prophesied*" – **Hymn #342**

Postlude: