

Sermon

“God With Us”

A Sermon for First Presbyterian Church

Sunday, December 22, 2019

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Is. 7:10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, 11 Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. 12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. 13 Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. 15 He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

Matt. 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*23 “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”*

which means, “God is with us.” 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

- I. Isaiah with King Ahaz at the waterworks for Jerusalem**
- A. Enemies colluding and amassing troops on the borders.**
 - B. Isaiah and cabinet so afraid they trembled like leaves in a tree during a gale.**
 - C. Final sentence prior to the start of today's lection is:**
 - If you do not stand firm in faith,
you shall not stand at all.*
 - D. Isaiah says, "ask for a sign and it will be given."**
 - 1. Ahaz says he won't ask for a sign...**
 - 2. Isaiah then turns to a nearby woman (likely Mrs. Isaiah) and says, "She's about to have a baby - this threat you are so concerned about will have evaporated into thin air by the time that child knows right from wrong" — maybe 3 years?**
 - 3. The Hebrew word which NT authors like Matthew take to mean "virgin," is actually a word which simply means "young woman" and is used throughout the Hebrew Bible to refer to women, both married and unmarried.**
 - 4. The "miracle" as Isaiah sees it is *not* that a virgin produces a child. The miracle is that God will intervene in the complex geopolitical crisis of Israel and will dispatch the violent predators amassing troops on the border.**
 - E. The test of faith for Ahaz is the test of whether he will trust in God enough to not mobilize the armed forces in response to the perceived threat.**
 - 1. That is — To trust that God is *with him* and that God's presence in his life and in his world changes the calculus of what is thought to be possible.**

F. Remember that verse 9 is —

*If you do not stand firm in faith,
you shall not stand at all*

II. When Joseph has his dream in which he is encouraged to not abandon Mary — who he is told is pregnant out of wedlock — he is told that Mary will name the child “Jesus.” (God saves)

A. Then Isaiah 7:14 is quoted “Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” (God with us).

B. At this moment of deep crisis for both Joseph & Mary we are left to assume that Joseph knew his Bible and remembered that the passage about a young woman giving birth to a child named Immanuel was really a story about whether Ahaz would trust God enough to stand firm in his faith while the kingdoms raged and tottered around him.

C. And Joseph, who is a better man than Ahaz was a king:

did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife,

I. At this time in Advent we are working our way through the “O-Antiphons.”

A. If you have been reading the daily devotions you know that already.

1. The antiphon for today is “Desire of Nations”

2. Interesting that the antiphon for this Lord’s day is an antiphon about the geopolitics of “the nations.”

3. It fits so well with Isaiah 7 - doesn’t it?

B. The vision of a world at peace grows out of the conviction that God is the God of all nations and that

the path out of discord, strife and envy is a path paved by trusting that God is present with us and therefore we can emulate the life of the Christ whose arrival we are preparing to celebrate.

II. Perhaps simple people that we are we hear these passages of sacred scripture about maintaining our trust amid the storms of geopolitics and war and we assume that they are above our pay-grade.

A. But Mary and Joseph hear the same news and their crisis was of a far more quotidian nature:

- 1. Can they still enter into marriage given their odd circumstance?**
- 2. Will Joseph, in essence, adopt this new child?**
- 3. How will they live in peace with neighbors who undoubtedly snickered and gossiped about a child born too soon?**

B. We each have those painful or difficult places in our lives and we are left to ask if we really do expect that God is with us — and with us in a way that makes a tangible difference.

- 1. Can God who is with us... lead us to re-make estranged relationships?**
- 2. Can God who is with us...cause us to be kind when our impulse is to return evil for evil?**
- 3. Can God who is with us...bring us to a place where we do not always assume that the answer is to spend more money of defense?**
- 4. Can God who is with us...give us enough fortitude to endure our hardships with patience?**

- 5. Can God who is with us...provide enough mercy to allow us to endure the sorrows of seeing others we love suffer?**
- C. God with us *is* the beautiful picture of a new-born Christ-child in its mother's arms...**
 - 1. But it is so much more than that!**
- III. So as we approach the day of Christmas, let us use these final days of Advent to seriously consider how our trust in the God who is with us can lead us to “stand firm in faith” always.**