

THE LORD IS COME TO BE WITH US
CHRISTMAS EVE

ISA 7:10-14
DEC 24, 2015

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 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 And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? 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.”

Have you sent a letter to the North Pole asking for free stuff?

If not, why not?

Is it because you don't want or think you need anything?

or because you don't think you deserve anything?

Is it because you don't think you will get anything anyway?

or because you don't think anyone is actually there

who would give you anything?

Is it because you don't know how to send a letter there?

or do you don't think there is any way to get letter there?

In text, King Ahaz of Judah was not urged to write to North Pole but to ask God for something, a sign that he would help him, but he wouldn't ask. Why not?

Maybe for all the reasons above

Christmas is time to expect something wonderful,
especially something wonderful from God.

Do we? If not, why not?

IT MAY NOT FEEL LIKE GOD IS WITH US
WE MAY NOT EXPECT GOD TO BE WITH US
GOD STILL COMES TO BE WITH US

IT MAY NOT FEEL LIKE GOD IS WITH US

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 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.”

Ahaz sounds afraid of being set up for disappointment.

Maybe he has been hurt by big expectations before.

Joseph in first Gospel reading could relate.

Because we don't hear of him after Jesus' childhood,
he may have already been an older man.

But after many years alone he has found a wife.

He is looking forward to getting married

Until he finds out she is already pregnant.

Imagine his disappointment.

He was a just man, a kind man, but what good did it do him?

Not only did it seem Mary would not be with him now

but surely that God was far away too.

But an angel came to assure him of even more than he hoped.

God wanted him to have this wife

and this child also would be for him, and even greater,

God himself would be with him, even and especially

in the hard days ahead when he it seemed he wasn't.

We too, may have hard days when it may feel like

God is looking the other way as we are struggling.

Maybe difficult people or health problems

make us think, "Do you see what is going on here!?"

Sometimes we may ask for that sign or other help

when we are grieving or depressed or afraid

and it feels like our prayers just bounce off ceiling

and we are left all alone and on our own.

Or we may simply have too many days like those

when the guests have all gone home

and the decorations have been taken down

and the emptiness and silence just echoes

and nothing can fill up the loneliness.

More than this, because of such feelings or other experiences

or persuasive ideas we have accepted...

WE MAY NOT EXPECT GOD TO BE WITH US

Isaiah replies, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?"

Ahaz is not the only one who may be disappointed.

Others are disappointed with him.

The nation of Judah is being threatened with war.

How does this king react? He is shaking with fear

and so everyone else is too.

Two enemies, Israel, their alienated relatives, and Syria,

belligerent neighbors, have ganged up against them.

King Ahaz, without ever bothering to pray to God for help,

got together all money he could to hire king of Assyria,

a thug from another neighborhood, to come help him,

which implies confidence not just in power of Assyria's army
but in power of Assyria's gods.

He acts like the God is not only absent but nonexistent.

Ahaz doesn't want to ask God for anything

because he doesn't think God can do anything anyway.

If there had been printing back then,

there may have been headline: God can't fix this.

Or maybe he didn't want to ask God for help

because he had suspicion what God would say to him.

Because he already knew what God said

about what was right and wrong

and he knew he was ignoring that and doing wrong.

So he didn't even want to hear what God might say

about what he deserved.

He didn't want God to be with him just as some don't want

to invite company who will find fault, criticize and scold.

Isaiah went on to tell him what God had to say anyway.

Right after these verses he tells Ahaz

he is going to have even worse problems.

Assyria, the one he hired to help him, will attack him.

Isn't that just the way it is?

When we ignore or decline God's offers of help

and find our own ways of dealing with problems,

maybe making ourselves feel better by spending money,

getting revenge, withdrawing, stomping out, yelling,

drinking, making bad friends, or even striking out,

we make our problems even worse.

But in spite of all this - because of all this.

GOD STILL COMES TO BE WITH US

¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Immanuel, as the first Gospel explains, means God is with us.

What this may mean to Ahaz is that in less than a year,

in time it takes for one who is still a virgin to have a son,

it will be so obvious that God is indeed with them

that she will call his name Immanuel.

Their problems will not all be over but they will see

that God is with them even in the midst of their problems.

But these words mean much more than they at first seemed,

just as God is always doing more than it may seem.

The ultimate sign that God is with us is that Mary,
while remaining a virgin, becomes pregnant
and gives birth to a son who is God himself.
By his presence he brought joy even to those hassling with
unplanned pregnancy, ruined wedding plans,
bureaucratic census nonsense, inadequate housing
and all that goes with having a newborn.
& joy to low wage shepherds working night shift as well.
God's presence with us means he understands
all the difficulties we deal with in life.
But his presence means more than just a listening ear
and a word of comfort and encouragement.
He came not just to share our troubles
but to take on himself the punishment
for all the things we do that cause troubles.
He was born to be with us so he could die for us
and by his blood purchase for us the forgiveness
that he now gives to us with his body & blood.
Jesus still comes to be with us today
and Holy Communion is one way he is truly present
to offer us peace and strength and joy.
In God's word and sacraments God gives us today a sign
there is someone there & he does have something for us.
We do need something from God & he will give it for free
even though we don't deserve it.
There is a way to reach out for it and it is right here.
In verses before this text, God sends Isaiah to tell King Ahaz,
"Be careful, be quiet, do not fear,
and do not let your heart be faint.
...If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all."
He says the same to us today.
We can stand firm in faith even in our troubles
because we are not alone or on our own.
Jesus is the sign that God is with us.

IT MAY NOT FEEL LIKE GOD IS WITH US
when life is disappointing
WE MAY NOT EXPECT GOD TO BE WITH US
or want him to be with us when we know we have
disappointed him and other people
GOD STILL COMES TO BE WITH US
to save us & forgive us & give us the wonders of his love.