

Mary, and the Virgin Birth

The Inconvenient Christmas—part 4

December 24, 2023

An amazing prophecy of the coming Messiah is known as “the sign of the virgin.” This event occurs over seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus!

This week we will look at the historical context, the sign itself, and the meaning of the sign.

DAY 1: Historical context

1. King Ahaz of Judah was an *ungodly* man. His rebellion, and that of the nation, brought judgment upon Judah. Judgment came from the hands of Rezin (Syria) and his ally King Pekah of Israel. Thousands are killed, and King Ahaz is taken captive.

2. Later, King Ahaz is released and returns to Jerusalem. Then he hears devastating news.

Isaiah 7:2 Now the house of David was told, "Aram has allied itself with Ephraim"; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.

3. King Ahaz and the people of Judah are shaking like a leaf! They’ve already experienced devastation once. They are weaker than before, their enemies are stronger. All appeared lost.

4. Instead of turning to God in repentance and for help, Ahaz relies on what he can do—form an alliance with a stronger power. He sends an appeal to the king of Assyria, for help.

Isaiah 7:3 Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field.

5. God intervenes. He sends Isaiah to meet King Ahaz outside the city of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 7:4 Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart ...

6. Here is the crossroad moment in our lives. Is our life anchored on the circumstances we think need to happen? If that is the case, there will be times when you will shake like a leaf. It doesn’t have to be that way. “Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart...”

7. When the bible says “Fear not,” it means that what you fear is not the last word of your life, neither is it the story of your life. God’s story in your life may take you through some great difficulties but the plot line of your life involves a greater story.

Proverbs 3:25 Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, ²⁶for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.

8. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 2: Proud control or humble surrender and trust?

1. Ahaz was doing something foolish. He was fearing a danger that *seemed in his imagination* what need not be true in real life. Rather than shake like a leaf he must not lose heart.

2. We are terrible at assessing the great challenges of life. To us they look overwhelming. To God it's an entirely different story, as Isaiah points out.

Isaiah 7:4 Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—...

3. Perhaps you've seen what remains in the fireplace the next morning, after a hot burning fire the night before. What is left?

4. To King Ahaz the Syrians and the Israeli coalition looks overwhelming, again! But not to God! To God those two kings and their armies look like two logs that burned out overnight in your fireplace.

... because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. ⁵ Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶ "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it."

5. The two kings are not just power hungry and want a land grab. They are fiercely angry at King Ahaz. It's "become personal."

*Isaiah 7:7 **Yet** this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "It will not take place, it will not happen, ⁸ for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. ⁹ The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son.*

If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."

6. King Ahaz should have remained steady, fixed, upon God's word to him. But King Ahaz won't take God at His word. His eyes are on what he can see, and thus he is terrified.

7. Are you at a point of desperation in some aspect of your life? Are you tempted to make your first course of trust and action what you can do? Or will you surrender this dilemma to God, ask Him to give you necessary wisdom, and to reflect Him even in the midst of your difficulty?

DAY 3: God's gives an amazing sign to a rebellious king

1. Rather than God throwing up his hands in disgust, God tries another tack. It's at this point that the rebellious King Ahaz is given an option.

Isaiah 7:10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

2, A sign would serve as confirming evidence of God's spoken promise. This is astounding.

3. Consider this:

- a. The One who is all wise makes a concession to the all foolish one.
- b. The One who is all powerful makes a concession to him who is weak.
- c. The One who is all merciful makes a concession to the all-rebellious king.
- d. God says to King Ahaz, if you won't believe my word that is invisible, then ask me for a sign that is visible!

4. And King Ahaz's response? He illustrates his rebellious nature by giving a foolish response to an all-gracious offer!

Isaiah 7:12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."

Isaiah 7:13 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?"

5. Rebellious is as rebellious does. Ahaz has no intention of even asking for confirming evidence. Why? Because Ahaz has no intention of doing what God says! In his perverse and twisted way he sounds "respectful" and "reverent." What a crock!

6. Faith is demonstrated in obedience. Unbelief shows itself in persistent stubbornness in going its way.

7. But just because Ahaz refused to ask for a sign didn't mean that God wouldn't go ahead and give a sign. That God did!

Isaiah 7:14 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.

8. We'll look at this unusual and wondrous sign the next two days.

9. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: The virgin will give birth to a son. She will name him Immanuel

1. There are times in scripture, particularly with prophecy where we move into a deeper world of meaning, understanding and mystery. This is one of those times!

2. The conversation between Isaiah and King Ahaz is going on in “real time.” Isaiah must have been dumb-founded that even King Ahaz would turn down a sign! If you’re a prophet what do you say? Do? Wait! It is this silent moment between these two men that God gives Isaiah a vision of the future.

Isaiah 7:14 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.

3. Isaiah sees a woman give birth to a son, who would save the people. But there is something very odd about this delivery. The mother is a virgin. How can that be? Impossible! Yet, that is what Isaiah sees. At the same time, God has told Isaiah that He would give a sign to Ahaz. These two things happen concurrently! And thus, as often happens with the Old Testament prophets, one message is spoken with more than one application.

4. To King Ahaz, a wondrous child will be born as the sign of deliverance from Syria and Israel.

Isaiah 7:15 He (the child) will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right.

5. The first few years of this child will span the length of time before Judah will suffer judgment. Judgment will not come soon.

6. As to future application of this prophecy: this is not the birth of any child, but a specific one.

7. The word translated “virgin” from the Hebrew is “almah” always designates an unmarried and pure woman. A virgin woman, one unmarried, and one who had yet to engage in any sexual activity will become pregnant and give birth. How can this be? Impossible! In all of history that has happened only once—to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

8. The mother will name the child, “Immanuel,” which means, “God with us.”

9. The miracle, to one like King Ahaz, is that the nation would miraculously be spared from being overrun and sent into captivity for a few years.

10. But the miracle for all of us is that God would come to us in flesh to be with us! There will be no doubt as to His identity, particularly with regard to the “impossible” circumstances of His birth!

11. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: Mary is to give birth to a son, a savior!

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

*Luke 1:31 **You will be with child** and **give birth to a son**, and you are to **give him the name Jesus**.*

³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

Luke 1:34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For nothing is impossible with God."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

1. The prophecy will be fulfilled in the only virgin birth possible.
2. Subsequent to the angel's visitation to Mary, an angel of the Lord visits Joseph!

Matthew 1:18 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.

*¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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**.*

*²¹ **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**."*

*²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and **they will call him Immanuel**"--which means, "**God with us**."*

3. What strikes you from the angel's message to Mary and then Joseph?

4. What strikes you from this week's "sign of the virgin birth?"