

# Exegesis and Sermons for Three Advent Services

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Requirements for EXT 410 – Isaiah

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The following contains exegesis of three texts from Isaiah, and three corresponding sermons, for the season of Advent. The first text is Isaiah 7:10-17, which prophesies the sign of *Immanuel* that will be given through a virgin. The significant theme addressed in this text is the giving of the sign in the context of a nation on the brink of war. The second text is Isaiah 9:1-7, which foretells the great light that Immanuel will be to lands in darkness, as well as giving his titles of “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” These titles demonstrate what kind of person Immanuel will be and how he will be a light to lands in darkness. The last text is Isaiah 11:1-9, where Immanuel is presented as the shoot of Jesse’s stump, and a discussion of the eschatological peace he will bring ensues. This prophecy of the work that Immanuel will accomplish is the significant theme of this last text.

The three sermons address Immanuel’s coming, his person, and his work. The titles for the sermons are “The Sign of Immanuel,” “The Titles of Immanuel,” and “The Work of Immanuel.” In each of these sermons the way in which God is with us – the way in which God *reveals* himself to us – will be proclaimed. The themes to be developed under each of these titles are 1) God reveals his trustworthiness, 2) God reveals his attitude toward us and 3) God reveals his work on our behalf. The sermons are purposefully generic, so that quotes and illustrations more appropriate to the time of delivery could be added in.

## **ADVENT I: THE SIGN OF IMMANUEL**

Isaiah 7:10-17 (Translation from BHS)

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD added to speak to Ahaz to say: <sup>11</sup> “Ask for yourself a sign from the LORD your God, ask to the deep or to the highest heights.” <sup>12</sup> And Ahaz said, “I will not ask and I will not try the LORD.” <sup>13</sup> And he said, “Please hear, house of David, little to you (is it) to exhaust the patience of men, that you also exhaust the patience of my God?” <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give to you a sign: “Lo, the virgin will conceive and will bear a son and his name will be called God with us (Immanuel).” <sup>15</sup> He will eat curds and honey until he knows to reject the bad and choose the good. <sup>16</sup> Indeed before the youth knows to reject the bad and choose the good the land will be forsaken that you fear because of her two kings. <sup>17</sup> The Lord will be caused to bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father days such as have not come since the day that Ephraim left Judah - the King of Assyria.

### **Exegesis**

This pericope comes shortly after the great call narrative of chapter six, in which Isaiah is told the content of his message to Judah and Israel: “Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’” (Is 6<sup>9</sup>) Already in chapter seven this call of God is being fulfilled by Isaiah. At the beginning of the chapter, Isaiah encounters King Ahaz of Judah, and cheers him with the good news that Judah is under God’s protection. The two kings that are threatening invasion, King Rezin of Syria (Aram) and King Pekah of Israel, will be thwarted. The Lord says, “It will not take place, it will not happen.” (Is 7<sup>7</sup>) The LORD asks King Ahaz to trust him, and him alone, for “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” (Is 7<sup>9</sup>). Yet The Lord knows that Ahaz will not trust, and so Isaiah brings with him his son, Shear-Jashub, whose name in Hebrew means “a remnant shall return.” Even in delivering God’s judgment, Isaiah holds out the prophecy that the LORD will continue to work to save his faithful people. Ahaz will hear what Isaiah says next, but will not understand.

What the LORD tells Ahaz through Isaiah is to ask for a sign. Yet Ahaz refuses, replying with words found in the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>A</sup> Isaiah responds to the whole house of David that the LORD himself will give a sign. This sign will be that an *almah* will give birth to a son, and his name will be *Immanuel*, or “God with us.” There is much controversy surrounding the meaning of the word *almah*. Does the word indeed refer to a *parthenos*, the Greek word for “virgin”, as the Septuagint has it? Or does it refer to any young woman of marriageable age, as the post-Christian Jews and other modern commentators argue? Luther himself argues that a “sign” of a young woman giving birth would be no sign at all.<sup>1</sup> It would be similar to prophesying a blue sky as the sign that war will come upon a nation. A modern commentator like Brevard Childs finds any interpretation of the passage as referring to a married woman “very unlikely.”<sup>2</sup> In any case, Luther finds the translation of “virgin” to be the most compelling, on the witness of Luke and Matthew:

Christians can readily answer this from St. Matthew and St. Luke, both of whom apply the passage from Isaiah to Mary, and translate the word *almah* as “virgin.” They are more to be believed than the whole world, let alone the Jews. Even though an angel from heaven [Gal. 1:8] were to say that *almah* does not mean virgin, we should not believe it. For God the Holy Spirit speaks through St. Matthew and St. Luke; we can be sure that He understands Hebrew speech and expressions perfectly well.<sup>3</sup>

The title to be given this child is *Immanuel*, which rendered literally from the Hebrew means “With Us is God.” Martin Chemnitz sees in this title a powerful description of Christ’s true nature. “[Isaiah] beautifully describes the union of the two natures by his use of the name *Immanuel*.”<sup>4</sup> More than simply

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<sup>A</sup> “Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah.” (Deut 6<sup>16</sup>, NIV)

describing Christ's full humanity and full godhead, it also describes what he will do. Melancthon writes of the passage thus: "In Isaiah, Christ is called Emmanuel, that is, God with us, because He is with us with all His riches. He keeps watch over us and drives away the devil."<sup>5</sup> The sign of Immanuel that God has promised will be a blessing for those who believe it, but a curse for those who do not. "For those of unbelief – Ahaz and his people – the sign is one of destruction (v.17), but for those of belief, the sign of Immanuel is a pledge of God's continuing presence in salvation (v.16)."<sup>6</sup>

This chapter is the first clear introduction of Isaiah's "Messianic Hope." This prophetic theme, that a coming Messiah will deliver his people from their enemies, even from death itself (Is 25<sup>8</sup>), is one of the chief themes of the Book of Isaiah.<sup>7</sup> In further chapters Isaiah will provide more details regarding the character and work of this Messiah. But here is the clear prophecy that this Messiah's birth will be extraordinary – of a virgin. Unlike Ahaz, many will come to put their trust in the Lord and his salvation. Many will come to know this sign of Immanuel whose love is greater than "the deepest depths and the highest heights." (Is 7<sup>11</sup>)

## Sermon

### “The Sign of Immanuel” - “In God We Trust”

On the face of every American dollar bill is stamped the phrase “In God We Trust.” I beg to differ. Can you – all of you – say with absolute conviction that you trust God? One hundred percent of the time? To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, you may fully trust God some of the time, and kind of trust God all the time, but you don’t fully trust God all the time. You’re not alone. Isaiah went to speak to the King of Judah, and he didn’t trust God either. Despite all the promises God had made and fulfilled for Israel, despite all his saving actions, rescuing them from slavery in Egypt, protecting them in the desert, sending manna and quail, and giving them the Promised Land, *they still didn’t trust him*. What’s God to do? What God has always done. One more time he will show that there is no one else worthy of trust. There is no one else Israel can put their faith in:

#### GOD REVEALS HIS TRUSTWORTHINESS

##### I. We don’t really trust God

God has to reveal his trustworthiness, because given the choice, we would rather trust ourselves. We are hardwired to put all our trust in our own ingenuity and our own resources. We trust our own ingenuity, first of all. We Americans especially pride ourselves on our “can-do” attitude. Anything you can do, I can do better. We are convinced that there is nothing we can’t do, if we put our mind to it. Send folks into space? You bet. Battle terrorism? No problem. Defeat any nation in the world in a fight? Absolutely.

When it comes to individual problems, we’re no different. Mounting debt? There’s always a new credit counseling service or debt consolidation loan. No job? Go out and get one – there’re lots out there! Don’t be lazy! Marital problems? See a counselor, work it out, or get a divorce. Need to feel spiritually uplifted? There’re lots of churches, mosques, synagogues and self-help groups out there. Go find the one that’s meaningful for you. There’s always an answer, if you think hard enough.

If we don’t rely on our ingenuity, we rely on our own resources. For every worry or potential worry in our life, there is a company willing to sell you a solution. A company willing to sell you peace of mind. Health insurance. Home insurance. Auto Insurance. Life, injury, and travel insurance. Pension plans. 401ks. Mutual funds and other investment plans. There is always some resource for fighting your problems, on your own terms, on your own time. Why trust in God when you can trust in yourself and your own solutions to life’s problems?

I can’t help but think of the “Ketchup Advisory Board” commercials on A Prairie Home Companion. No matter how bad things are in the neighborhood, in your family, or even in your own life, the solution is ketchup, and its “natural mellowing agents.” That’s the lengths we’ll go to, trusting in anything but God. Even trusting in ketchup! ☺

##### II. God demonstrates in himself that he is trustworthy

God will NOT let you trust in yourself. Time and again he has broken into our lives to demonstrate that he alone is worthy of trust. To show that he alone can save us. God alone can be trusted to rescue us from life’s worries, from despair, even from death itself. The LORD alone – and no one else.

In our Old Testament lesson, Isaiah brings King Ahaz *great* news! The two armies that are threatening his kingdom, Israel and Syria, are about to get theirs. There is no need for Ahaz to worry or to plan – God

will take care of everything. Great news! Don't panic Ahaz – just trust God to work everything out. And for goodness sake, whatever you do, don't try and work things out yourself! Which of course is exactly what Ahaz is trying to do. So the Lord tells Ahaz to ask him for a sign. Any sign! Anything at all to show that God is worthy of his trust. But Ahaz doesn't want to trust God. He wants to trust himself.

So God gives the mother of all signs. The sign to end all signs. The promise of *Immanuel*. The promise that God himself will come and dwell with us. That's literally what the Hebrew word *Immanuel* means: "With Us is God." A child will be born of a virgin, and he will be God dwelling with his people. God has always promised a deliverer for his people – a Messiah – an "Anointed One." But now the Lord tells us this deliverer will be *himself*. No one but God could demonstrate that God is absolutely, totally, and completely trustworthy.

That's what the Gospel is all about folks. Jesus Christ – God and man – became God with us to show how much we can trust him. Jesus lived his life *for us*. He gave up his life on the cross *for us*. He rose again from the dead *for us*. To show that God always, always, always makes good on his promises. Better than we ever could. In ways we could never imagine. This is the sign of Immanuel that Isaiah gives to Ahaz, to all of Israel, to us here today. God promises to save us, even from death. Only God is trustworthy. Because he is *Immanuel*, the God who is with us. And this shall be a sign for you as well. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther. Vol. 16, *Luther's Works, Vol. 16 : Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*. Edited by Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann. Luther's Works. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1969) Isaiah 7:14.

<sup>2</sup> Brevard S. Childs. *Isaiah*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 66.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther. Vol. 45, *Luther's Works, Vol. 45 : The Christian in Society II*. Edited by Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann. Luther's Works. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, c1962) 207.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Chemnitz. *Loci Theologici*. J.A.O. Preus, tr. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989) 458.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 565.

<sup>6</sup> Childs, 68.

<sup>7</sup> Childs, 62.

## **ADVENT II: THE TITLES OF IMMANUEL**

Isaiah 9:1-7 (Translation from BHS)

<sup>1</sup> Therefore no longer in gloom are those in distress, as in the former time he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the next time he will honor the way of the Sea along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. <sup>2</sup> The people, the ones walking in darkness, have seen a great light. The ones living in a land of deep shadows, on them a bright light. <sup>3</sup> You have increased the nation, you have made great the joy. They rejoice before your face as the joy in harvest, as they rejoice in the plunder being divided. <sup>4</sup> For you its burden and the rod of its shoulder, the scepter of its oppressor, it has been destroyed as in the day of Midian. <sup>5</sup> For every shoe that tramps in quaking and mantle rolled away in blood and it has been for burning – fuel of fire. <sup>6</sup> For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the rulership will be on his shoulder, and his name will be called “Wonderful Counselor, Great God, Father Eternal, Prince of Peace.” <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his rulership and prosperity there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and uphold it with judgment and with righteousness from now until everlasting. The zeal of the LORD Sabaoth will do this.

### **Exegesis**

This chapter follows soon after the giving of the sign of *Immanuel*, and after a chapter dealing with the need to trust only in God. Though Jerusalem will stumble and break on the stone of the LORD (Is 8<sup>14</sup>), yet his servants will remain as signs and symbols of his faithfulness (Is 8<sup>18</sup>). Now in chapter nine Isaiah prophesies further concerning the Coming One, Immanuel. First, his coming will honor “the way of the Sea, along the Jordan,” in other words the Galilean region. Second, his coming will be not only for Israel but for the Gentiles, as well. Third, he will come to those in darkness as a great light. These words are certainly taken up by John in the prologue to his Gospel: “In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness...” (Jn 1<sup>4,5</sup>) Immanuel will come not as a mighty warrior or prince, but rather as a child “born to us, a son...given to us.” (Is 9<sup>6</sup>) It is assumed that this child and the son to be born of the virgin (Is 7<sup>14</sup>) are one and the same. Childs, as a modern commentator, sees no other way of interpreting chapters seven through nine of Isaiah.<sup>1</sup>

The coming of Immanuel as a child does not mean he will be without title or authority. In the same verse in which Isaiah announces the coming of this child, he also gives him a four-fold designation. Some commentators call this child the “Prince of the four names.”<sup>2</sup> These are titles of kingly authority, “a counselor of unique wisdom and abundant power, endowed with enduring life, and the bringer of eternal peace.”<sup>3</sup> As “Wonderful Counselor”, Messiah will comfort his people in their oppression more than any other before. He will also be called “Mighty God.” Melancthon writes, “David and Isaiah clearly placed the Messiah above the angels and all creatures and called Him God, as in Ps. 45:11 and Is. 9:6.”<sup>4</sup> As Isaiah prophesied in chapter 7, this child will be of divine origin. The title “Everlasting Father” may seem to be troublesome. How is it that the Son is called “Father”? Chemnitz points out that “the Son is not the Father, even if the term “Father” is used with reference to the person of the Son...The name ‘Father’ is used with reference to the essence.”<sup>5</sup> Luther points out that this title of “Father” is a reference to Christ’s work, not his Person.<sup>A</sup> The last title Isaiah gives to Immanuel, “Prince of Peace”, describes most clearly the type of kingdom the Messiah will govern. Luther writes regarding this title:

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<sup>A</sup> This, then, indicates the work and business of this King, not His Person. This name fits no one else. He always increases His reign, He always begets children and rules over them, He always remains the Father, He does not assume the role of tyrant, His children are always His beloved. This is beyond question the most delightful kingdom. [Martin Luther. Vol. 16, *Luther's Works, Vol. 16 : Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*. Edited by Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann. Luther's Works. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1969) Isaiah 9:7]

In the kingdom of Christ there is grace, comfort, forgiveness of sins, joy, peace. He does not deal with the transgressor in sternness, but as a father. The forgiveness of sins is justification, and peace follows justification. This peace is not only peace of mind but also plenty and soundness of mind and good health of the body. Such is the reign of Christ: It is extended by killing; it is fertilized by the blood of the believers; and the more distress there is, the more peace grows in the heart.<sup>6</sup>

The government, or rule, will be on this child's shoulders. Like his father King David, the Messiah will sit on the throne of Israel. However his rule will not be the same as David's. This coming king will destroy the oppressor's scepter, "as in the day of Median." (Is 9<sup>4</sup>) This is a reference to the story of Gideon's defeat of the Midianites recorded in Judges 6 and 7. The implication is that the Messiah will destroy the oppressor's scepter, not with worldly power, but with divine aid, much as Gideon and his army were to rely on God and not their numerical strength to destroy the Midianites. Luther sees in this verse a contrast being set up by Isaiah between Christ's rule and the rulers of the nations:

The government of Christ are we, whom He carries on His shoulders. Other kings are carried like rods by their subjects. All kingdoms of the world are carried and are burdens on our neck, and they reduce bodies and possessions to slavery. Therefore in the manner of ruling in the kingdom of the world and in that of Christ there is a difference. In the kingdom of the world the prince or king alone is free, all others are servants. But in Christ's kingdom Christ alone is a servant, and we are free....Thus in the kingdom of Christ those who serve rule, and those who rule serve.<sup>7</sup>

In chapter seven the LORD gave the sign of Immanuel through Isaiah. He described how Messiah would come through the womb of a virgin. Chapter eight described the Coming One as the cause of stumbling, especially for all those who reject the sign. Now chapter nine further discloses the character of the Messiah, the child to be given to us. As Childs writes,

There is a narrative movement from 7:1-9:6 that portrays the rejection of the promise of God by the house of David and the resulting destruction of the people of God as divine hardening takes effect. Conversely, there emerges the hope of a faithful remnant...foreshadowed by the sign of Immanuel.<sup>8</sup>

## Sermon

### **“The Titles of Immanuel” - “Does God Care About You?”**

Some of you may know I’m a big fan of the Simpsons. There was an early episode of the show where Bart, the eldest Simpson child, was about to fail 4<sup>th</sup> grade. On the eve of his final test, he got down on his knees, and he prayed. He prayed to a God he didn’t know. More significantly, he prayed to a God whose attitude toward him he did not know. Did God care about the problems of a 4<sup>th</sup> grader? Was God listening to little Bart’s prayer? Sometimes we’re just like Bart. We wonder if God is for us, or against us, or merely tolerates us. Do you and I really matter to God? Today, Isaiah tells us that the answer to that question is yes. Yes, yes, yes! We can be sure that we are valued and important to God – each one of us – because through the lips of Isaiah...

#### GOD REVEALS HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD US

##### I. We believe that God is indifferent toward us

Too often we doubt God’s attitude toward us. We may be fully convinced that God is the absolute sovereign creator of all things. We may believe with all our heart that God knows all things. We may believe with all our heart that God can do anything he desires. We may believe there is nothing happening in the world or in our lives God isn’t aware of. But that’s about all we do know about God. He is a powerful and mighty but very distant clockmaker. He watches over the universe, stepping in here and there to tinker with this person or that problem, but he isn’t really interested in the details. Certainly he’s not interested in the ins and outs of your life or mine, right?

Or maybe we believe that he’s more interested in what’s in his own heart than what’s going on in ours. Sometimes we see God as being as selfish as we are. We think he’s more concerned about his own interests than about ours. He’s constantly checking up on those who are sinning against him, and zapping them when they do. Or at least ignoring them and their prayers. God is a holy God, a just God, a righteous God. We are none of those things. So God is always on the lookout to bring us back in line when we fall out. But only to defend his own honor. Only to defend his own interests.

##### II. God is a Savior who is With Us

At the time of Isaiah’s prophecies, there were probably lots of Judaites who felt that way. God was off somewhere, watching from a distance. Or worse yet, God was concerned only about their sinfulness, and not about their salvation. To them and to us Isaiah brings the good news of Immanuel. He brings the good news that God is coming to dwell with us. God is doing this not to check up on us, and not to judge, but to redeem. To make righteous. To rescue. To save people like you and me. God is coming to be with us because of his love. Love is God’s attitude toward us. We see God’s loving attitude toward us in the four titles Isaiah gives to Immanuel.

First, Immanuel is to be called “Wonderful Counselor.” We might also translate the title as “Wonderful Comforter.” What a gracious promise! Who here tonight doesn’t need a comforter or a counselor? Someone who will wipe away our tears? Someone who will give us a compassionate ear? Immanuel will do just that. God will be with us to comfort and counsel in a wonderful way. Because God’s attitude toward us is that of a wonderful counselor.

Second, Immanuel will be called “Mighty God.” This is to stress the point of his name, God with us. Immanuel will be God himself, with all his might and power. He won’t have that might and power to

punish, but to judge with righteousness, and to comfort his people. God himself will come and be born *among* us, so that we might know that he is *for* us.

Third, Immanuel will be called “Everlasting Father.” This may seem a little confusing. Jesus Christ, after all, is the Son of God, not the Father. But this title is more about his work than his person. The title tells Immanuel will care for us as a Father cares for his children. There is a sense in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are “Father” to us all. This is the sense that Isaiah is using “Everlasting Father.” Martin Luther puts it this way: “This name fits no one else. He always increases His reign, He always begets children and rules over them, He always remains the Father, He does not assume the role of tyrant, His children are always His beloved. This is beyond question the most delightful kingdom.”

Lastly, Immanuel will be called the Prince of Peace. This is what the rest of Isaiah’s prophecy is about. Immanuel will bring lasting, true peace. Not just an end to physical war, although that is what we usually think of when we think of peace. No, this is a deeper peace. A peace between us and God. True reconciliation between the Creator and his creatures. Through Immanuel life for us and his death for us we will be at peace with God. This isn’t our doing. We didn’t make the peace. We didn’t even take the first step. God did. Because that is God’s attitude toward us: always seeking, always restoring, always saving. Immanuel comes to show us that we matter, each and every one of us, to God. Jesus Christ, our Lord, and God’s Son, is Immanuel – God with us. Jesus was born a child and lived among us, died our death on the cross, all so that we would have peace with God, from this time forth and forever more. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts has done this. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Brevard S. Childs. *Isaiah*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Old Testament Commentary*. Herbert C. Alleman and Elmer E. Flack, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965 c.1948) 653.

<sup>3</sup> Childs, 81.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Chemnitz. *Loci Theologici*. J.A.O. Preus, tr. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989) 50.

<sup>5</sup> Chemnitz, 76.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther. Vol. 16, *Luther's Works, Vol. 16 : Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*. Edited by Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann. *Luther's Works*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1969) Isaiah 9:7.

<sup>7</sup> Luther, Isaiah 9:6.

<sup>8</sup> Childs, 81.

### **ADVENT III: THE WORK OF IMMANUEL**

Isaiah 11:1-9 (Translated from the BHS)

<sup>1</sup> And a shoot will come from the stump of Jesse, and a sprout from its roots will be fruitful. <sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him; the Spirit of wisdom and of discernment, the Spirit of counsel and victory, the Spirit of knowledge and worship of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> And his delight is in the worship of the LORD. And not by sight of his eyes will he judge, and not by hearsay in his ear will he decide, <sup>4</sup> but he will judge with righteousness the poor, and he will decide with impartiality the poor of the earth. And he will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the Spirit from his lips he will kill the evil. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness will be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt on his hips. <sup>6</sup> Wolf and lamb will dwell together, and the leopard with the goat will lie down, and calf and lion and fattened animal together, and a young boy will lead among them. <sup>7</sup> And cow and bear will graze together, their young will lie down together, and lion like an ox will eat straw. <sup>8</sup> The nursing child will play over the whole of the serpent, and over the nest of the viper the weaned's hand shall be. <sup>9</sup> They will not hurt and they will not destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the water covers the sea.

#### **Exegesis**

Chapter ten describes the woes to befall Assyria, as well as another prophecy regarding the return of a remnant. Next follows the good news of chapter eleven, describing the restoration that Immanuel will bring to the earth. If chapter seven introduced the sign of Immanuel, and chapter nine his titles and person, this chapter speaks of the work he will accomplish. Immanuel will “decide with impartiality,” especially for the poor. (Is 11 <sup>4</sup>) No longer will the rich and powerful enjoy a privileged position in the courts. His bywords will be “righteousness” and “faithfulness.” (Is 11 <sup>5</sup>) The end result of his rule will be peace on the LORD’s Holy Mountain, and an earth full of the knowledge of the LORD.

First, this Coming One will arise from the house of David, as promised by the LORD. But more specifically, he will come out of the “stump of Jesse.” The implications of these words are three-fold. The first is that David’s rule, at this point, has come to an end. The tree no longer grows, but has been felled. In the words of one commentator, “...the rulership of David’s seed is here viewed as cut off or interrupted...”<sup>1</sup> The idea that the promised Immanuel will be a direct and immediate descendent of Ahaz, namely Hezekiah, seems to be excluded by this prophecy. Second, the naming of the stump as Jesse’s, not David’s, ties in with Immanuel’s concern for the poor. Immanuel will not rise out of the worldly power of a royal house, but will come as David did, elected by God out of the house of Jesse, without any outward connections or prestige to recommend him. “The naming of Jesse signals a sure continuity with Israel’s past, but serves as a reminder of David’s humble beginnings and of a promise grounded in divine election rather than on human pride and royal pretension.”<sup>2</sup> Third, Immanuel will form a kingdom for himself, rather than come into a kingdom that immediately recognizes him and enthrones him itself. Luther writes,

This is what he called Christ, and such is the beginning of the rising spiritual kingdom. It is obviously different from that of an earthly kingdom, where an assembly of people is provided with a king. In this case the King is born first, and then He gathers a people for Himself. At first there will be a single Sprout risen out of the root, from the old and hopeless trunk, which is nevertheless watered with a divine strength.<sup>3</sup>

Isaiah also prophesies the Spirit resting on Immanuel with various charisms. These include understanding, or discernment, as well as might which could also be understood as victory, and fear which could also be understood as a worshipful spirit. Certainly it is not “fear” as we now understand the word, but more of a reverent awe. Chemnitz sees the Spirit who gives these gifts as identical with the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> He sees in these verses a reference to Deuteronomy, namely the passage,

Observe [these laws] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? (Dt 4<sup>6,7</sup>)

Since Israel and Judah could not demonstrate wisdom and understanding to the nations, Immanuel would. He would further fulfill verse seven, not only by being close, but by actually becoming human and walking among his people. Furthermore, the seven-fold giving of the Spirit demonstrates that Immanuel’s kingdom will not be worldly, but spiritual.<sup>A</sup> Luther writes, “In that kingdom all affairs will be conducted by the Spirit alone, and the Spirit will be poured out over the whole kingdom.”<sup>5</sup>

Immanuel will judge, not by weighing testimony, but by judging people’s hearts and minds. He will not need his senses, for he will know immediately the motives and actions of everyone (Is 11<sup>3</sup>). Neither will he need armies and courts to enforce his decisions, but he will “strike the earth with the rod of his mouth.” This rod of his mouth has traditionally been interpreted to mean the Word of God. This theme is picked up, for example, in Revelation and in Hebrews. John writes in his Revelation, “Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.” (Rv 19<sup>15</sup>) Hebrews records, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.” (Hb 4<sup>12</sup>) One commentator writes, “It requires a large faith in our time to believe that ‘a little word can fell’ the powers of evil. It was, however, the faith of an Isaiah, and of a Luther.”<sup>6</sup> Luther himself writes, “The rod is the spoken Word. Behold, lip and tongue and mouth of Christ are all who sincerely preach the Gospel.”<sup>7</sup>

What Immanuel will do is bring a spiritual kingdom that, rather than make tyrants of all people, makes servants and peaceable animals of them all. Where Israel, and indeed all nations, seeks God to establish a visible and powerful world government to establish peace, the Lord plans something different. As Childs writes, “Chapter 11 offers both a correction and an exposition of the messianic reign.”<sup>8</sup> Luther notes that the wolf will associate with the lamb, and not the other way around. “The tyrants who formerly preened themselves with their power, wisdom, and wealth will shed their feathers and tufts and with bowed neck confess themselves to be sinners, and they will be harmless.”<sup>9</sup> One of the first fulfillments of this prophecy is St. Paul, who once persecuted the Christians as a religious leader, but who became as meek as a lamb for the sake of Christ.

All of this will come to pass on God’s “Holy Mountain.” Interestingly, the prophecy at this point is not to an end of war throughout the world, but rather that Immanuel establishes spiritual peace at Zion. The prophecy, then, must be in reference to the Church. As Zion was the symbol of God’s presence, localized at the temple, so now is the Church the new Zion, in which Christ dwells in the temple of his Word and his Sacraments. In the Church the wolf associates with the lamb, and Christ establishes a peace between those who were formerly at war. This is the beginning of a new creative act that will eventually impact all of the cosmos. As St. Paul writes in Romans,

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Rm 8<sup>19,20</sup>)

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<sup>A</sup> The Spirit is of the Lord, of wisdom, discernment, counsel, victory, knowledge and worship, according to the Hebrew. (Is 11<sup>2</sup>) This seven-fold giving also indicates the perfection of Immanuel’s possession of the Spirit.

## Sermon

### **“The Work of Immanuel” - “What’s God Gonna Do About It?”**

“What’re you gonna do about it?” The words of every bully in the country. I wish I could tell you I never heard those words when I was young. Sadly, I’d be lying. I was the typical 50 lbs bookworm weakling all the way through school. So whenever I got caught in a corner by the sports jocks, that’s the phrase I got to hear: “What’re you gonna do about it?” Coincidentally, they’re the same words the devil and our sinful nature throw back at God. “What’re you gonna do about it, Lord?” What’re you gonna do about war? What’re you gonna do about disease? What’re you gonna do about sin, about death, about all the misery of this planet? Today, through the words of Isaiah, God tells us exactly what he’s “gonna do about it.” Through the prophetic words of Isaiah,

#### GOD REVEALS HIS WORK ON OUR BEHALF.

##### I. We look for God to work with wordly power

Of course, what God’s “gonna do about” sin, death, and the devil may not be quite what we want. We’ve become accustomed to looking for solutions to come with power. With strength. With a strong arm. When America’s got a problem, there are usually two places we look to for help. The army. And money. We look to the armed forces for help in protecting us. We look to them to keep the world peace. We look to them for help in disasters. Who doesn’t swell with pride when they think of the military might of the American forces? Ain’t nobody gonna push us around. Ain’t no one gonna tell America, “what you gonna do about it?” ‘Cause we’ll show ‘em exactly what we’re gonna do about it!

And if the army can’t do it, then our wallet can. There isn’t a problem in the world that can’t be solved with a big enough check, right? Every new disease we discover, we’ll find a cure, won’t we, if only we had money? Every social ill, from homelessness to poor education can be solved with just enough money. Those are our two solutions to every problem: military might and money.

But neither of those things can get at the root problems of our existence. No matter how much money we have or give away, it’s never enough. For every disease we cure, there are two more to take their place. No army in the world is powerful enough to rout out a terrorist who doesn’t want to be found! And whether it’s from a disease, a terrorist attack, or just plain old age, people still die. We’re still all faced with death. We’re still faced with the reason for our death: our rebellion against God. The separation we have placed between ourselves and the Lord. The wall we’ve built to keep God out of our life. What’re you gonna do about that? What money or army can restore the relationship with God that we’ve thrown away?

##### II. How “With Us is God” shows God’s true power

The answer is: no amount of money, and no size of army. If something’s gonna be done about the mess we’re in, God’s gonna have to do it. He knows it. You should know it too. There are three ways that God is going to do something about sin, death, and the devil. He’s not going to fight the strong, but make them weak. He’s going to bring peace. And he’s going to do it all with a little child.

First of all, Isaiah says, “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together.” (Is 11<sup>6</sup>) Does this mean that God’s going to fix sin, death and the devil by setting up a petting zoo? Not quite. What the Lord has in mind is a little different. We would expect that God would bring peace to the world by subduing the strong and powerful, right? That’s exactly what he intends to do. The strong are the wolves and leopards of the world. The lambs and the

calves are the weak. But the strong of the world are going to come to lie down with the weak. That's how Immanuel, God With Us, is going to bring true peace to the world.

Isaiah also says, "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain." (Is 11<sup>9</sup>) What does this mean? Notice that God doesn't say there'll necessarily be peace everywhere. Of course, God intends for there to be world peace at the end of the age. But when Immanuel first comes, he will come to bring peace to the holy mountain. Does this literally mean Mt. Zion in Jerusalem? Jesus himself says "a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem." So the mountain itself is not the important thing, but what the mountain represents. What Zion represents is the place of God's dwelling – the place where God promises to be present – the place where God promises to be "with us." Where Immanuel, Jesus Christ, is now forever present with us in this world is in the Word and his sacraments – in his Church. The Church of Christ will come to be a place of peace, no longer a place of destruction and hurt. Sometimes the Church doesn't seem like that at all. And yet here Christ comes among us in worship and continues to say, "Peace be with you." He comes and says, "I baptize you." He gives his body and blood and says, "Given for you for the forgiveness of sins." You are on Mt. Zion right now – because this is where God has promised to be with us. This is where he is *Immanuel*.

But most importantly, Isaiah says this about how God will come to be with us. He says, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." Jesse was King David's father. The Lord promised that the house of David would rule forever. But like us, the Israelites came to see David's House as powerful armies and treasurer houses. Everyone forgot how David had become King – by God's choosing a young shepherd boy, Jesse's son. By saying that Immanuel will come from Jesse's stump, Isaiah is reminding us of David's origins. Jesus Christ, Immanuel, will come with no great power behind his name, and with little money. His power will come from being God With Us. He won't come with armies. He won't come with gold. In fact, Isaiah says he will come as a little child, leading the strong and weak. He will come to rescue and bring peace, God's way. Jesus will come to be God With Us in weakness, as a little child, like a branch from a stump.

That's how God's gonna deal with sin. That's who God is gonna deal with death. He's going to raise up a stump from Jesse, an Immanuel, to be God with Us. He will make the strong to lay down with the weak. He will bring righteousness and justice to the poor. He will make peace on the mountain of God for all people. Not with mighty armies and a fat checkbook, but as a little child. This is how God will be with us forever. This is how God will be our Immanuel – in Jesus of Nazareth, the little child who will lead us all. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Old Testament Commentary*. Herbert C. Alleman and Elmer E. Flack, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965 c.1948) 655.

<sup>2</sup> Brevard S. Childs. *Isaiah*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 102.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther. Vol. 16, *Luther's Works, Vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*. Edited by Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann. *Luther's Works*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1969) Isaiah 11:2.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Chemnitz. *Loci Theologici*. J.A.O. Preus, tr. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989) 135.

<sup>5</sup> Luther, Isaiah 11:4.

<sup>6</sup> *Old Testament Commentary*, 655.

<sup>7</sup> Luther, Isaiah 11:4.

<sup>8</sup> Childs, 102.

<sup>9</sup> Luther, Isaiah 11:6.

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