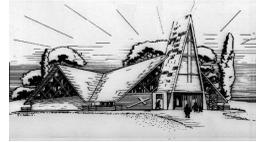




Free Evangelical Lutheran  
Synod in South Africa

## Sermon - Fourth Sunday of Advent

*O come Immanuel!*



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

### • The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mt 1, 18-25:

- **ESV** 18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
- 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.
- 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.
- 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."
- 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:
- 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).
- 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,
- 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.
- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts for the Word that reveals to us the birth and coming of Emmanuel! Amen.*

### • **Dear Daughter of Zion!**

- Did the Angel of the Lord just one day come to Joseph and tell him these things? Was God doing Christmas without any preparation, without any order? And then the name, Joseph should name the baby, Jesus. This would fulfill an old prophecy where a virgin would conceive and bear a son with the name of Immanuel. Aha, we realise, this was planned long, long ago!
- God is not a God of disorder. The Holy Spirit is not sporadic and spontaneous, all of a sudden doings things nobody could have known, just out of the blue! God always announced His great deeds whether in judgement or deeds of Grace ahead of time, in this specific case, ages ago. A prophecy given to the king Ahas was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, Immanuel!
- So, we have to trace back, to the time of the prophet Isaiah speaking to king Ahas, before the destruction of Israel and Judah. History is important when God is at work. He announces what He will do at a specific time in history and usually

much later it comes to pass. The people might have forgotten about it long ago, but God never forgets His promises made. There is one thing God cannot do: He cannot forget or neglect His promises. He always keeps His promises. In this way His promises and their fulfillments bind together history with the result what happened hundreds of years before Christ's birth, in the time of king Ahas, is important for us today, so that we can get the fuller picture of what God did and what His intention was.

- At that time the people of God was already divided in Judah and Israel, here referred to as Ephraim. Israel was more to the north centered around the two cities Dan and Bethel whilst Judah was more to the south centered around Jerusalem. The king of Israel, Pekah, joined forces with the king of Syria against Judah. In their first attempt they couldn't take Jerusalem. When king Ahas heard that Israel was siding with Syria his heart and the their hearts of his people trembled.

- It is then that the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to king Ahas, who was a descendant of David, to comfort him. Strangely enough Isaiah had to take his first-born son with him, named Shearjashub. His name means: "A remnant will return". This is significant: Isaiah's older son was a living proclamation of Judah's survival. Isaiah had to proclaim to Ahas, do not be afraid. Your enemies will not succeed.

- However, the problem was that Ahas was already leaning towards cutting a covenant, making an alliance with the Assyrians, who were another dominant force in the region. Then the LORD said to Ahas [Isa 7,10-17]: *"Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven."* But Ahas said, *"I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test."* And he said, *"Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!"*

- Ahas didn't want to ask for a sign! He did not accept the Lord's help. He didn't

want the Lord's sign! He didn't want Immanuel, the Lord with him. He trusted more in his own way of helping himself. We hear a little bit later that another sign was given by the name of Isaiah's second son, namely that Judah will be all but swept away by Assyria, except for a small remnant that would return. The Lord was using children with specific names to proclaim His intentions! But to no avail. Ahas didn't want to listen and accept God's signs!

- So, the Lord's promise of a virgin bearing a child was still outstanding! The child with the name Immanuel, God with us had not been born in OT times. We have to remember that after the prophet Maleachi there still was a time of some 400 hundred years where God did not send a single prophet. He was silent for a long long time!

- Finally the Angel of the Lord proclaimed to Joseph that this birth was going to happen and that he, Joseph, himself a son of David, would be the legal father. Mary would be the virgin who would conceive this little baby, Immanuel. They should call Him Jesus, because "He will save His people from their sins."

- What a great message! What great faithfulness of God towards His nation! After all these years he hadn't forgotten them nor their sins. But now, the virgin birth would happen, a son would be born who would save them from their sins! All the sins of Israel and Judah, all those we find recorded in the books of the OT. All the numerous times the kings sacrificed to idols and some even built a temple to Baal. All those grave and terrible sins Jesus would forgive them.

- It is beyond any doubt that Jesus is the Messiah of the ancient Israel. They don't need to wait any longer for another one. Jesus fulfills all the outstanding prophecies of OT times!

- What does all of this teach us? How reliable the LORD is! He punished His people on numerous occasions, after long periods of grace, but He never forsook them. Finally God came with the ultimate gift: In Jesus He would be present amongst them forever. He would save them from their sins by being amongst them with His Grace! In Jesus this final saving act of God was conceived and was born. He was born right amongst them, by the virgin Mary with the help of the Holy Spirit. And Joseph would be his legal foster-father, according to the Law! Jesus would be the real son of David, because Mary also was a descendant of king David.

- There cannot be any doubt. Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. God kept His Word.

• This is good news for us too, who traditionally stem from the Gentile nations, because Jesus is our Saviour too! We have a God who has a documented track record of thousands of years, bound together in one book, one of its kind- there is no religion which tells the story of God with His people- salvation history- like we have it in the Bible. It is completely unique.

• And so Christmas, the birth of Christ is deeply embedded in OT times and prophecy. This all contributes to the utmost certainty we can reckon with. Of course, to realise its truth and know that it involves my life, that I am included there is another stretch which the Holy Spirit fulfils in us, that we come to trust this God, who is amongst us, amongst His people gathered around His Word!

• This also draws us into the power of God, for unto us a son is born! If we have our Ahas-times, when we have to face our giants, when we have to face mountainous burdens, don't make alliances with the world, don't run to the sangomas or the spiritists or any alliance that goes against God and His Word. Forget the charismatic false prophets on TBN and on the rest of the media. They lead you away from the pure Grace of God! Jesus is Immanuel, God's presence of Grace amongst us

• Here, in His written Word, we have His real sign revealed and given to us, that He will help us. He saves us even from our worst sins, even if we have sacrificed to Baal or any old idol! He is here to be with us, He is here for us, who can be against us? Nothing is missing. Its documented, we have it in black on white, its written! What more of a sign do we need?

• We know that Jesus has fulfilled His ministry for us, He paid the ultimate sacrifice of being forsaken by His Father for our sakes and dying a cursed death.

• Therefore, we become interested in His story, where He came from, how everything fits together, how it all makes sense, how beautiful it is, how much God had to suffer on our behalf, how many long-suffering years of patience were involved. We belong to Him. What we find in the Bible is our story, the story of your and my salvation. And its the story of salvation of many still sitting in darkness. Bring them in, into the light, for unto them a son is given, too! **Amen.**

• *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.** [Phil 4,7].*