

**A Miraculous Birth**  
Isaiah 7:14  
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December 21-22, 2019

The signs of Christmas are all around us...

- *Dear Santa, I've been good all year...OK, most of the time...Once in a while...Forget it, I'll buy my own stuff.*
- *Making a Christmas Wish won't get your car back...No parking. Tow Away Zone.*
- *Christmas Calories Don't Count.*
- *Friends Don't Give Friends Fruitcake.*
- *To Anyone Who is Christmas Shopping For Me...I Wear a Size 100 in \$\$.*
- *Welcome Semi-Annual Worshippers.*

We're calling our December series, "Down to Earth: Christmas According to Isaiah." Last week we looked at the indescribable uniqueness of the name of Jesus as "***Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace***" from Isaiah 9:6-7. This weekend we'll be unpacking an incredibly precise prophecy from Isaiah 7:14. Our main point is this: *Jesus came down in order to lift us up.*

### **The Gospel According to Isaiah**

The Book of Isaiah is filled with predictive prophecies about the birth and the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. It's been called the "fifth gospel" because it contains so much good news and is quoted more often in the New Testament than any book, except Psalms. On Christmas Eve we'll look at a few verses from Isaiah 53 in a message called, "In Our Place."

Isaiah ministered in the Middle East during a really difficult time. Terrorists from Assyria were attacking and beheading people. Fear gripped everyone and Isaiah dared to believe something better was coming even though his culture was corrupt and everything around him seemed so dark. Seems similar to our situation, doesn't it?

In Isaiah 64:1 we hear him longing for the Lord to somehow come down into his world to make sense out of all the nonsense, to bring peace to all the problems,

to dispel the darkness and to extricate evil: ***“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down...”***

In Isaiah 6, we read of Isaiah’s calling as a prophet when he comes face to face with the holiness of God. After admitting his own misery and calling on God’s mercy, Isaiah signs up for ministry by saying, ***“Here am I, send me.”***

Scholars suggest as many as twenty years passed before we get to chapter 7, where we’re introduced to an evil king named Ahaz. He was the most ungodly ruler to date, building a pagan altar in the Temple area and sacrificing his own children to the pagan god Molech.

The prophets Micah, Hosea and Isaiah called Ahaz to repentance, to no avail. Because he had deliberately disobeyed God, his kingdom came under attack from all quarters. According to verse 2, this caused King Ahaz and his cabinet to panic: ***“The heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.”*** Isaiah is told to comfort Ahaz by bringing his son Shear-jashub to the water reservoir. Interestingly, Isaiah means, *“Yahweh is salvation”* and his son’s name means, *“A remnant will return.”* The message is clear to Ahaz – let Yahweh be your salvation and a remnant will return.

Isaiah points out in verse 9: ***“If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.”*** This is a Hebrew pun that can be translated like this: *“If there is no belief, you will find no relief.”* That’s still true today.

In verse 10 Ahaz is told to ask for a sign that would help him believe. In verse 12 we see that Ahaz refused to ask for a sign by claiming a pretense of false piety. The truth is he didn’t want to submit to God. Instead of obeying God, he deliberately disobeyed Him. This lights Isaiah up in verse 13: ***“Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?”***

With that as context, we come to one of God’s most remarkable Christmas signs. God picks a sign that is beautifully incomprehensible and biologically impossible in verse 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.”***

This prophecy combines God’s intervention in the immediate situation regarding Ahaz and also looks ahead to an ultimate fulfillment of His covenant

commitment to David that would take place 700 years later when a son would be born to a virgin in Bethlehem, the town of David. In other words, there are two fulfillments in this passage – one that is near and partial and one that is far and complete.

Let's look at this spectacular sign phrase by phrase...

- **“Therefore...”** Whenever we see the word **“therefore”** we should ask what it's there for. In this case, it's a word of contrast to show what God will do despite of Ahaz's disobedience. This word was often used by the prophets to introduce a divine declaration.
- **“the Lord Himself...”** This is the name *Adonai*, which speaks of God's sovereignty. The pronoun **“Himself”** helps us to see that this sign comes from Him and He will fulfill it.
- **“will give you...”** We see in verse 13 that God moves from Ahaz to the **“house of David.”** The word **“you”** is in the plural, helping us to know that God's desire is for everyone to respond to the gift He will give.
- **“a sign...”** The word **“sign”** is used 183 times in the Bible to convey a mark or a miracle. A sign often brought a message of wonder or of terror. A sign is a signal most often used to describe awe-inspiring events and is designed to communicate certainty as in Isaiah 38:7: **“This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that He has promised.”** Ahaz refused to ask for a sign but he gets one anyway. When used in the plural, signs are often combined with wonders (as in the Book of Acts) to represent works of God or to demonstrate His powerful presence among the people.
- **“Behold...”** The word **“Behold”** is used to arrest our attention, to indicate the importance of what is about to be said. It could be translated as, *“Lo and behold”* or *“Look now!”* What God is about to do is intended to be shocking and startling and surprising. When used in Isaiah, **“behold”** always relates to something that will happen in the future.
- **“the virgin...”** The definite article means it's a specific woman who is a virgin. The word for **“virgin”** was used of a young, never-married woman. While there was likely an immediate application in Ahaz' day,

ultimately, God had in mind one specific teenager, a virgin named Mary, whom He had chosen to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

- ***“shall conceive...”*** This was no ordinary pregnancy and no ordinary birth. A virgin with child would certainly stand out as a miraculous sign! Incidentally, in some medieval works of art, Mary is often found reading Isaiah 7:14 at the moment Gabriel arrives to announce this incomparable conception.
- ***“and bear a son...”*** It’s obvious but still important to mention that this was an unplanned pregnancy for Mary. Mary’s unplanned pregnancy was God’s planned pregnancy. She chose life because the Lord is the one who put that little life in her womb – as He still does today. Later, when Mary is with her relative Elizabeth, who was also pregnant, we read in Luke 1:41 that Elizabeth’s baby leaped in her womb because he was in the presence of Jesus in Mary’s womb: ***“And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb.”*** Blobs don’t leap, but babies do! Check this out - Ahaz sacrificed his own son to the god Molech while Mary gave birth to God’s Son who sacrificed His own life in our place.
- ***“and shall call his name Immanuel.”*** The name ***“Immanuel”*** means, *“The strong God with us.”* In Hebrew, the word order is a bit unusual: *“With us is God.”* One commentator writes, *“If you have a problem with a virgin conceiving and bearing a child that should be nothing in comparison to the thought of Immanuel – God with us in the flesh. This is nothing short of a miracle.”*

*Jesus came down in order to lift us up.*

### **Reasons to Believe the Virgin Birth**

Because the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a key doctrine of Christianity and critical to understanding Christmas, let’s look at five additional Scripture passages from the Christmas narrative.

- Matthew 1:18: ***“Before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”***

- Matthew 1:19 clearly shows that Joseph knew he could not have been the father: *“And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.”*
- Matthew 1:25: *“But knew her not until she gave birth to a son.”*
- Luke 1:27 refers to Mary as a “virgin” twice: *“To a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary.”*
- Luke 1:34 reveals that Mary knew she was a virgin when she asked the angel an obvious question: *“How will this be since I am a virgin?”*

As someone has said, *“It is extremely difficult to make the terminology of the Virgin Birth refer to something other than the Virgin Birth.”* I would change “extremely difficult” to “impossible.”

Jesus has two natures: human and divine. As human He is able to experience all that we experience, and as God He gives us all we need: *salvation*. This is clear from the announcement of the angel to Joseph in Matthew 1:21: *“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins.”* He’s a son who saves.

Let’s look at this a bit closer.

**1. Jesus is fully man because He came from Mary’s womb.** *It was necessary for the Savior to be born of a woman*, so He would be of the same nature as those He came to save.

**2. Jesus is fully God because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit.** It was just as *imperative that He should be holy, sinless, and blameless* in order to be the spotless sacrificial lamb. No mere human is qualified to redeem sinners from their sins.

Both of these requirements are fulfilled in the person of Jesus. He is fully man, yet fully God. He is the God-man; one person possessing two natures. John 1:14: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* The New Living Translation renders it this way: *“So the Word became human and*

***made his home among us.” One paraphrase puts it like this: “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.”***

The immortal, invisible, untouchable and holy God is Immanuel, God with us. He suffered as we suffer and was tempted as we are tempted. He cares for you, understands you, loves you and sympathizes with you.

You may be thinking, “*Yeah, I guess I believe in the Virgin Birth, but why does it matter?*” I like how one pastor explains it...

*“The Bible teaches that we’ve all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It also teaches that the wages of sin is death. Sin had to be paid for, so throughout the Old Testament, God’s people were taught that a flawless sacrifice was needed to pay the price for their sins. The Law called for repeated animal sacrifices. But everyone knew the blood of animals didn’t really fix the problem. What was needed was a perfect SOMEONE who would willingly die for our sins. But no mortal man could be found that was sinless enough to die in our place...only God could be perfect, sinless and pure enough to be our perfect sacrifice.*

*“But there was a problem. By definition...an immortal God can’t die. God could NOT become our sacrifice...because a sacrifice has to die. He would have to be made human in order to die. So God decided...that He would personally pay the price for sins. And (of course) that meant, He had to become mortal...that’s why the SIGN mentioned in Isaiah is that, “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” And what does IMMANUEL mean? God with us. In that one word God declared that His child was God in the flesh.”*

By means of the virgin birth, Christ entered the world guiltless of the sin of Adam. Because He is born of Mary, He is truly human; because He is conceived by the Holy Spirit, He is free from inherited sin handed down from Adam. Thus He is fully able to stand in our place to take our punishment. He could pay for our sins precisely because He had no guilt or shame of His own. 2 Corinthians 5:21: ***“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”***

*Jesus came down in order to lift us up.*

This should move us to awe and wonder that the God of the universe entered the womb of a virgin to become like us in order to save us from our sins.

- He was just like us . . . and yet, He was nothing like us.
- He walked among us . . . and yet, He came from God above.
- He grew up in Nazareth . . . and yet, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
- He is our friend . . . and yet, He is our Savior and Lord.
- Little children loved him . . . and yet, He baffles the greatest minds.
- He was called “son of Mary” . . . and yet, He is the “Son of God”

### **Do You Believe It?**

Ponder the wonder of Matthew 1:22: ***“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.”*** Each of the events of the first Christmas came to pass exactly as they were prophesied. The Lord is the one who laid all this out. That should give us spiritual goosebumps.

Listen to how many times Matthew 2 mentions the fulfillment of prophecy.

2:5 – ***“In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet...”***

2:15 – ***“This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son...’”***

2:17 – ***“Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah...”***

2:23 – ***“And He went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that He may be called a Nazarene.”***

Let’s look now at Matthew 1:23 where we see the 700-year-old prophecy from Isaiah 7:14 quoted: ***“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).”*** We have more than a sign of God’s presence, here we have the Son who is Savior fully and completely present.

This is close to how Isaiah said it but there’s one key word added by Matthew. Listen to the Isaiah account again: ***“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”*** And now here’s what Matthew says: ***“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.”*** Did you catch it? It’s the word ***“they”*** as in ***“and they shall call his name Immanuel.”***

Matthew makes the change deliberately to make a very significant point. Now *all* believers can call Him Immanuel. Christmas must become personal. The “they” is “us” which is ultimately “you.” Will you call His name Immanuel? Is God with *you*?

There’s one other difference when Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14. He defines and translates the meaning of “***Immanuel***” by the use of parenthesis: (***which means, God with us***). He wants his non-Jewish readers to understand that God is with us. In a similar way, we must make sure we’re translating and explaining the Scriptures so people can understand and apply them to their lives.

It’s fascinating that Matthew began his narrative with a sign of the coming of Immanuel – God with us – and at the end of His life we see the other confirming sign – the Resurrection. Matthew concludes his gospel with Immanuel’s promise in Matthew 28:20: “***And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.***” The One who is “God with us” will *always* be with us.

Because Jesus is with us, He goes through hard times with us. At our staff Christmas party on Monday night we went around and shared how God has grown each of us during Grow Time. It struck me that almost everyone on the team has gone through some trying times in their families these past couple years. Here’s just some of what I heard – deaths, disappointments, dignoses, cancer, stroke, heart surgery, family situations, hospitalizations, stress and more.

Pastor Dan shared a devotional reminding us that people coming to Edgewood are full of shock, pain and hurt, especially this time of the year. Here’s how he ended: “*We get to serve, and tell people that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man, was born, not just so we could have a celebration and give gifts, but He came to die for our sins offer hope to all of us.*”

Four years ago, about 70 of us went caroling in the neighborhoods around Edgewood. We divided into four different groups to sing carols about Christ. I noticed a number of different reactions and responses that correlate to how some of you might be feeling toward Immanuel right now.

- Some were just not home. The message came but no one was there to hear it. Perhaps you don’t put yourself in a position very often to hear the message.
- A few were too busy and told us they didn’t have time. Does that describe you?

- One man cracked the door open but when he understood what we were doing, he quickly shut the door and turned off the light. Have you shut the door on spiritual matters?
- A couple people hid in the house and didn't answer. Have you been hiding from God?
- Others opened the door with big smiles on their faces and leaned forward to hear the music.
- Some invited the rest of their family to come and hear about Christ.
- A number were really happy, thanked us, and even applauded.
- One man came to the door on his hands and knees because he couldn't walk. He listened to the songs of Christmas and thanked us for coming. I was very moved by his posture and the effort it took for him to hear the message of Christmas.

What about you? Will you open the door to Jesus Christ today or will you slam it shut on the Savior? Will you run and hide? Are you ready to come to Him on your knees, bowing before His supremacy, ready to confess that He is Lord and Christ? You can have Immanuel with you, right now.

We could say it like this: At the cradle we see *God is with us* and at the cross we see *God is for us*. Let's personalize this. God is *with you* and God is *for you*.

*Jesus came down in order to lift us up.*

Why did God become one of us? 1 Timothy 1:15: ***“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”*** This deserves full acceptance from each of us. As a sinner, will you accept the salvation He freely offers?

Unfortunately, not everyone is interested in Immanuel. Kevin DeYoung is spot on when he writes, *“Perhaps the most common reason people don't believe in God is simply this: They don't want anyone telling them what to do.”*

Martin Luther once remarked the Incarnation consisted of three miracles: *“The first, that God became man; the second, that a virgin was a mother, and the third, that the heart of man should believe it.”*

I like what a guy named Angelus Silesius said centuries ago, *“If Christ were born in Bethlehem a thousand times and not in thee thyself; then art thou lost eternally.”*

Ultimately the virgin birth is a mysterious miracle and so is the new birth. Ask God right now to do a miracle in you.

I'm reminded of how personal Christmas must become for each of us. Listen to what the angel said to the shepherds in Luke 2:11: ***"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*** Do you believe He was born *unto you*? If so, it's time to repent *this day* and accept Him as your Immanuel. All the signs of Christmas are designed to point you to the salvation of Christ. Listen to the very next verse: ***"And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."***

Unfortunately, there are some who will oppose the sign as we see in Luke 2:33: ***"Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed."***

Revelation 21:3 reveals what God wants for you: ***"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.'"***

In light of God dwelling with us, can I encourage you to make 2020 a year of greater growth for you? Our adult growth group space and the Student Center are now open on the lower level. While we're still waiting for carpeting, the rooms are now being used. This past Wednesday night over 60 students gathered for a Christmas party in the Student Center!

We'll be offering 13 different groups on Sunday mornings in January during both services. In addition, we have a group that meets at 8:00 am for early risers. Along with our regular groups, we'll be offering two electives – one to help people share their faith and the other to equip parents in the discipling of their children. Mainspring, our ministry to college and 20's will also be offering a Growth Group. For a complete schedule, stop by the Resource Kiosk in the Fireside Room.

I was so moved last weekend to watch 10 people get baptized. On Sunday, two people were saved, one in each service. On Monday another person was saved. I'll never forget the joy all three of them expressed when I spoke with them. In each case, these individuals accepted Christ as a result of people from Edgewood living on mission. One person who was saved is the sister of

someone from Edgewood, another is a neighbor of an Edgewood attendee, the third person saved is a co-worker of an Edgewood member.

Are you waiting for a sign to be saved? Jesus Christ came in the cradle in order to go to the Cross. When He returns, He'll be wearing a crown. Are you ready to repent and receive salvation?

During Christmas we often think of gift giving. I was on the receiving end of this on Friday when I stopped by a local Chinese restaurant for lunch. I ran into some guys I know from Youth Hope and then I noticed an Edgewood member having lunch with his boss at another table. I greeted the guys from Youth Hope and then sat at the table next to the Edgewood member. Since he and his boss were leaving we chatted for just a few minutes. When they left I picked up my Curry Chicken and sat down with the Youth Hope guys.

When I got up to pay for my lunch, my friend Kevin offered to pay for me. I did the little dance where I said, "*You don't need to*" and he said, "*I want to.*" I smiled and gave in to his generosity. Just then the manager said that someone else had bought lunch for all four of us! I realized it had to be the EBC member.

I wasn't expecting a double blessing when I walked into the restaurant. I had certainly not asked or expected this but was grateful for this extravagant generosity. As I was thinking about this, it hit me that's a bit how salvation is. Jesus paid the price, picking up our tab. In order for His payment to be applied, I must accept it. I could try to pay for it but it wouldn't make much sense, would it?

The ultimate gift was given when Jesus took on human flesh. He now offers us the free gift of salvation. Will you receive it?

*"Thank You, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth in such a miraculous way. With all my heart I believe You are the Son of God who was born of the Virgin Mary and then died on the cross as full payment for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank You for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I turn from how I've been living and I want to do what You tell me to do. I come as it were on my hands and knees, bowing before Your supremacy. I now receive the gift of salvation and forgiveness by asking You to come into my life. I need You to save me. Thank You for being born to die in my place and now I want to be born again. Make me into the person You want me to be. In the name of Jesus, Immanuel, I ask this. Amen."*

**Closing Video: “With Us.”**