

# ADVENT OF LOVE

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[0:00] Good morning. Good morning. We got that working. Thank you, Ray. I'm also going to set my timer so that I don't go over.

! So welcome to the fourth Sunday of Advent, our last Sunday before Christmas! The theme, of course, for this fourth Sunday of Advent, and the candle we light is for peace.

Of course, we know that this peace is Jesus Christ, and so today we want to visit a very popular passage that the Apostle Matthew actually looked back to when we described the birth of Jesus. Now, traditionally on this fourth Sunday of Advent, we meditate on the peace that Jesus brings to the world and to us as individuals. Of course, we come to the Scriptures so that we might meditate on its truth, which brings us comfort and peace in our hearts during this Advent season.

2 Thessalonians 3.16 says, Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times, in every way, and the Lord be with you all.

[1:10] Today we focus our hearts on the Lord of peace, who came down from heaven in the form of a baby, and it is this baby who is the ultimate fulfillment of our passage today that comes from Isaiah.

Today also starts the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. Now, Hanukkah is not found in our Bibles. It might be there, but we're not quite sure.

But historically, it is a holiday that celebrates another miracle. In the Second Temple period, after Alexander the Great had conquered much of the world, and now he's gone, he's dead.

We have what is known as the Hellenistic period going on. During this time, the Greeks of the Seleucid Empire had taken over Jerusalem and the surrounding area, including the Temple.

They have instituted a number of reforms whereby the Jews could not worship as they were supposed to be worshiping. During this time, we have a family in the 160s BC, known as the Maccabees, who revolted along with the people and reinstituted the temple worship.

[2:18] After they went through the temple that had been ransacked, they removed all the idols. They put the candle or the menorah back in the temple. But there was only enough oil for one day's worth of candlelight.

However, the oil miraculously lasted for eight days. And therefore, in these eight days of Hanukkah, the candle is lit every day as a reminder to the Jewish people that God was still present and that he is the light of the world.

Just as God was with them then, he still wants us to know today that he is with us as well. So let's get into the text and see what's going on here.

Again, reading at the beginning of this chapter so that we can have some background information and understand what's going on in our passage a little bit. So Isaiah chapter 7, I invite you to open to.

And we'll be reading from the English Standard Version, which is in your pew. Beginning at verse 1. In the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezen, the king of Syria, and Pichah, the son of Ramaliah, the king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it.

[3:32] When the house of David was told Syria is in league with Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

And the Lord said to Isaiah, go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shiar Jashub, your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the washer's field.

Say to him, be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezen and Syria and the son of Ramaliah.

Because Syria with Ephraim and the son of Ramaliah has devised evil against you, saying, let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves and set up the son of Tabiel as king in the midst of it.

Thus says the Lord God, it shall not stand and it shall not come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezen, and within 65 years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people, and the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Ramaliah.

[4 : 39] If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all. Verse 10, again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, ask a sign of the Lord your God, let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.

But Ahaz 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 Emmanuel. 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.

So what's going on in this passage? What's the context of what we just read? Before we can talk about any sort of prophecy here, we have to understand the immediate context as it might give us some clues as to what this prophecy actually means.

[5 : 56] So in chapter 6 of Isaiah, we have the death of King Uzziah, and this signals a change in the Davidic line of kings. We now have a ruler who is the grandson of Uzziah.

This is taking place during the Syro-Ephraimite War somewhere around 734 to 732 B.C. I know you didn't think you were going to come here for a history lesson today, but this is important.

Now there's a new ruler in Assyria, and his name is Tiglath-Pileser III. By around 738 B.C., he's conquered lands west of Assyria, namely Hamath, Tyre, Biblos, Damascus, and the northern nation of Israel.

As we read, Menahem paid tribute to him in 2 Kings 15-19. He is, in effect, asserting his dominion over all these areas and deporting people and replacing these governments with the government of his own.

As we begin this chapter, he's come west. He's confronting this anti-Assyrian alliance by King Rezin of Damascus and King Pekah of Israel. And we can read this story in 2 Kings 16.

[7 : 05] These two vassals were trying to force his way to join them against Assyria, but Ahaz has refused, and the other two kings attacked him and wanted to replace Ahaz with their own ruler, this person named Tabiel.

In 2 Chronicles 28, we read the death of about 120,000 Jewish soldiers being killed as Syria and Israel defeat the forces of Judah.

So Ahaz attempts to get Tiglath-Pileser to help him. But when he comes, he not only defeats Syria, turning it into an Assyrian province, he also took land and taxes from Israel, as well as made Ahaz an Assyrian vassal.

He's to report to the king of Assyria. There was also a successful Edomite and Philistine attack on Judah that you can read about in the same chapter, which is 2 Chronicles 28, seeing that there's a lot of weaknesses that Ahaz has, particularly in his military prowess.

He is a young king. During his reign, and this is especially important, the religious situation deteriorated quite a bit in Judah.

[8 : 21] Ahaz did not want to do what was right in the eyes of God. He supported Baal worship. He even introduced into the courtyard of Jerusalem's temple a copy of a pagan altar that he saw in Damascus.

So he probably even offered sacrifices himself to the Assyrian gods, the very people who would be his conquerors. He also removed some of the gold and the bronze from the temple, including palace furniture, and he gave it to the Assyrian king as tribute.

Ahaz lacked faith in God, in Yahweh. And this was illustrated when he failed to trust God, even when Isaiah promises military victory in this passage.

In the next chapter, you can read about and see that Isaiah concludes that the people of Judah had rejected God, following after their king, even going as far as depending on mediums and necromancy, rather than following the laws of God.

In chapter 14 of Isaiah, Ahaz dies. And this happens about 715 B.C. There's a new king, the son of Ahaz, Hezekiah, who begins to undo much of what his father began.

[9:37] And so he follows after God. However, it's a little too late. A few short years after this, Jerusalem itself falls completely to the next big bad, Babylon, and in 586 B.C., Jerusalem, the temple is destroyed, the Jewish people are exiled into Babylon, and things go from bad to worse.

But here in our passage today, people are confused, they are scared, and the country is in religious and political turmoil. Might sound familiar.

Yes. After all that they have already seen, they see what happens to their northern neighbors Israel and the chosen people of God.

Rather than be lights in the world to the Gentile nations, they are following the very gods from whom Yahweh warned them to keep from following. So you ask about this time, Paul, what in the world or why do we need to know all of this?

Just tell me how this story applies to my life and let's get out of here. Let's get to the part about Jesus coming into the world so that we can feel better and have a little hope.

[10:54] And that's fair. Why do we need to know all this? God has revealed Himself to us in the words of Scripture. He wants us to know Him and to know about Him.

He also wants us to know about ourselves and where we came from. But you say, I'm not Jewish. This doesn't pertain to me. I didn't come from there. This is not my history.

But is it not? Paul tells us in Galatians that we as Christians are the offspring of Abraham. We share that with the Jewish people.

Let me ask you something. I have a dream. Who said it? How about four score and seven years ago?

One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind? Wow. We know who said all these things and we can even probably tell the context in which these things were said.

[12:01] We know what was going on in this country at any given time just by hearing short snips of these speeches. Yet we struggle with knowing what was going on in the Scriptures.

Which should be even more important to us. Why is this stuff so important? Because it's important to God. This is about us and our relationship with our Creator and our King.

So in our text, the Lord speaks to Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah. He tells him, Trust me and I will give you a sign so that you will trust me. Just name it.

Whatever it is, just name it. But Ahaz doesn't have that kind of faith. This is the king who is idolatrous and has led his country into idolatry.

He has no faith and he is by no means a faithful king. He kind of just feigns this attitude now of modesty. Saying that he doesn't wish to test Yahweh.

[13:03] But Isaiah sees right through this. He sees right through his refusal. And he sees it not as modesty but as revealing his very lack of faith. How often do we have that same sort of pretend modesty in our lives?

That we try to mask our lack of faith in our lives. Things get tough financially. The world looks like it's going topsy-turvy politically.

We put our faith in and our trust in things not of God but of man. Our own sign of idolatry. Well, that's what Ahaz is doing right here.

So Isaiah says, Here then, O house of David, is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God also? And here's the kicker. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel. So Isaiah says, You know what? God's going to give you a sign anyway.

[14:06] And this sign is a child. A son. Now a couple of things to unpack from these couple of verses. The word virgin. In Hebrew, people get hung up on that word a lot.

In Hebrew, it's called ha-alama. When Matthew writes in chapter 1, verse 23 about this sign, he uses the word virgin. The Greek word virgin.

The Septuagint form of the Bible, which is the Greek writing of the Old Testament, they use the word virgin. But the Hebrew word is not virgin. It's young woman.

People get hung up on this word. And we get hung up on the Masoretic text of young woman. But this is where the people of Jesus' day would have read this as virgin.

Therefore, in our Bibles, it's virgin. It really just needs to mean in this context, though, in this context, a young woman who is of childbearing age.

[15:14] In the immediate context, I would suggest that that's a better translation. And we'll get to that in just a few minutes. But secondly, let's talk about the name Emmanuel.

I hear people say outside of church circles, some inside church circles, well, his name was Jesus. It wasn't Emmanuel. They never named him Emmanuel. And that's true.

But firstly, we are assuming that this is automatically speaking of Jesus. Now, this context, it's not speaking of Jesus. Okay? Keep that in mind. And we'll get there.

We'll get to Jesus in just a minute. It means that God is with us. In Isaiah 9, we read in verse 6, where a child has been born for us, a son has been given to us, and the dominion will be on his shoulders, and his name is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Now, who do you know that has this as a proper name? Who do we call Mighty Counselor? Now, that's their name, not just what they're called. Anybody named that? Anybody named Everlasting Father?

[16:23] Anybody named Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace? The answer is nobody's named that. Not that I know of. I mean, this is the 21st century. There's all kinds of crazy names out there.

It's amazing. But you see, people of the royal line, the Davidic line, and even throughout the ancient Near East who were kings, were given these hyperbolic names so that people could understand their importance.

So when a king was born, there would be this big to-do about them, and they would be given these names so that the average person like you or me would look at the king and see their God.

This happened all over the ancient Near East. So here the name Emmanuel is more like one of these hyperbolic titles than it would be a proper name so that people would know that their king has this relationship with God.

So here, God is with us. Something else to notice is that later in verse 13, the address E is not Ahaz in particular, but the house of David.

[17:29] This is plural in its context. This suggests that the oracle of Isaiah is addressed to and about the royal line itself and not simply about Ahaz, although he is the intended first recipient.

The idea is that God's infinite patience is being severely tried. And so in verse 14, the sign given to you, that you is also plural. It means the Davidic line, including but not limited to Ahaz.

And the son called Emmanuel, born to this virgin. By the way, the word has a definite article in front of it. The ha that I mentioned a minute ago, the. So this is talking about a particular woman, a particular virgin of royal blood.

Notice that it says that the child shall eat curds and honey. Now that probably sounds a little bit strange to us because we're used to Gerber's baby food. But this is what a royal infant would eat in the ancient Near East.

This is what they would feed this royal infant. So who is this child? Some would say that it's Isaiah's son since he's mentioned here, Shear Jashub.

[18:47] However, I don't think that that's very likely because how can this be known as the land of Isaiah's son? He's not of royal lineage. But in the immediate context, it could probably refer to Hezekiah, who we read about later in chapter 9, who would be one of the good kings of Judah, following after God and turning the hearts of the people back to God or to another member of Ahaz's household.

He has a lot of wives and so He has a lot of sons. It could be one of them. Again, here the prophecy is looked at in its immediate context. You can't just skip to Jesus.

To Ahaz, to the Jews, to the ancient people who read this, who heard about this, it would have meant something to them. God has revealed Himself to people then and to people now.

I think I said one time that I heard from someone else say that the Bible was not written to us, it was written for us. And it was written to every subsequent generation.

God has revealed Himself through the Scriptures to all of us. So here, though, things have temporarily changed in the long run, they didn't.

[20:09] Like I said, after the Assyrians, the Babylonians come, then it's the Persians, the Greeks, the Medes, and finally, the Romans who were in this land at the time that we read in Matthew 1.

Now, in Matthew 1, verses 23-25, Matthew writes those words, Behold, the virgin will become pregnant and will give birth to a son. They will call His name Emmanuel, which is translated God with us.

And Joseph, when he woke up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded. He took his wife and didn't have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he called His name Jesus.

Notice His name is not Emmanuel, though this is what He is called in the Gospel. And John tells us that God tabernacled with His people, or in other words, God was with us.

Matthew does not tell us either that Jesus, who was predicted in Isaiah 7-14, but rather that Jesus was the fulfillment of what was spoken of in Isaiah 7-14.

[21:18] These need not be the same thing. Fulfillment is a bigger category which doesn't just involve predictive prophecy.

But the impression that one gets overall from the formula questions in Matthew that the evangelist does indeed believe that this is Jesus that it's speaking of and aspects of His life and ministry that were predicted in the Old Testament texts, especially in Isaiah.

Prediction is more specific than just foreshadowing or type or anti-type. It means that there are not merely precursors to New Testament figures and events in the Old Testament, but that the New Testament figures and events and especially Jesus are actually referred to in the Old Testament prophecy, however metaphorically or obliquely.

It is perfectly possible for God to fulfill the words more than one time. I think it's fair to say that Jesus was the more perfect fulfillment of Isaiah's words here.

Emmanuel, God with us, in a much truer sense than any mere Davidic child, Jesus really is God with us. He has a divine nature.

[22:32] He is God. Isaiah did not have a full understanding in this oracle. A prophet can say more sometimes in a poetic oracle than he realizes even though he doesn't understand the significance.

So we've talked about the immediate context that the prophecy was fulfilled. It meant something to people at the time and it meant something to the original readers of the text. It was to give hope to a people in a very complex political situation in the world.

These people who were under threat of exile and political oppression. The son of the Davidic line known as God with us was to bring peace. Peace perhaps in this sense is an absence of war.

But also peace in Hebrew, and you've probably heard that word shalom, means completeness or wholeness. In other words, a king who would bring a peace that surpasses all understanding.

Hezekiah, as good a king as he was, could not completely turn the hearts of the people nor bring this hope. Manasseh was the next king and he was the worst of all the Jewish kings.

[23:46] But he had a son, King Josiah, who brought the most reforms, but despite all of these kings and all of the reforms that might have come, whether they were good or bad, whatever their intentions, none of them was the king who would bring this completeness, this wholeness, this peace.

When the Old Testament closes, God's people are no longer in exile. They've come back, they've rebuilt the temple, but God is still not with them. He's not taking up residence again in the temple. And though they're back in Jerusalem and not in exile because King Cyrus of Persia brought about some reforms and allowed them to go, the Jewish people go back. They're still idolatrous.

They're still not following. They're still not going after the laws of Yahweh even though some of these reforms are taking place. But when the New Testament opens and we read the Gospel of Matthew, especially that first boring chapter of genealogy that nobody likes to read, we find out that there's a new king coming.

We read in the very first sentence of Matthew in that book of genealogy, the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

[25:07] We know that we are about to read or what we're about to read is about a new king in this Davidic royal line, the promised Messiah of God for his people Israel.

But more than that, because we are Gentile Christians, and remember I said our history is tied into the history of Israel through Abraham, Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

God promised to bless all people through Abraham because of his righteousness, his faithfulness to God's covenant. And Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was also righteous and faithful to God's covenant, more righteous and more faithful.

And through him, we know that we have a peace that surpasses all understanding. This son, born of a virgin, would bring a lasting peace. Yes, there is political turmoil in the world.

Yes, there is war in the world. There are rumors of war in the world. It seems that the entire world today is on the brink of collapse and utter chaos.

[26 : 12] But rejoice, for Jesus has overcome the world. He is the prince of peace, the king of kings. Isaiah may not have understood this completely, but you and I do and can because God has revealed Himself to us through Scripture.

He has revealed Himself through His Word. And we know that His Word is true and that God is faithful. He proves again and again throughout the pages of Scripture His faithfulness.

In the first century, though the Romans had taken over Jewish Palestine, God was faithful in that He fulfilled His promise of ushering in a time of His Messiah.

God has always fulfilled His promises and He still fulfills those promises today. So as we look forward to Christmas next week, let us not forget this Son who was born of a virgin as a sign of peace in the world.

A lasting peace. A lasting completeness and wholeness. God's plan to restore His people to Himself will come to pass.

[27 : 26] Indeed, it has come to pass in the first advent of Jesus Christ. And it will come to fruition and fulfillment in the second advent of Jesus.

But until that day, we look forward with all hope, praying without ceasing for His coming. And knowing that no matter what happens in the world or in your life, that Jesus Christ has overcome the world, He has forgiven you of your sins, and restored the relationship between us and God through His death, burial, and resurrection.

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.