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Isaiah 7:10-14 ¹⁰ **Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz,** ¹¹ **"Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."** ¹² **But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test."** ¹³ **Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?"**¹⁴ **Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.**

Think of how many times the Bible tells us that God is with us. Psalm 23 says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." At the burning bush Moses is afraid to lead the people of Israel and God's answer is, "I will be with you." The refrain of Psalm 46 is "The mighty LORD is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress." When you are afraid, whether it is because of a snow storm or because of a disease, the most comforting thing to hear is "God is with you." The message of Christmas is that God came to be with us in a special way. He became a human being and lived on earth with us. Isaiah had prophesied this long before it happened. He said "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and you will call him Immanuel, which means: **God with us.**

When Isaiah first spoke these words, he was trying to tell the king of Jerusalem, King Ahaz, that God would be with him. You see King Ahaz had just learned that two kings had made an alliance against him. The King of Aram, a man named Rezin and the King of Samaria, a man named Pekah, had joined forces and were coming to destroy King Ahaz and all of Jerusalem. Thus made King Ahaz scared. But Isaiah wanted to tell him that God was with him. IN the verses just before our passage, the LORD sent Isaiah to King Ahaz to tell him, **"Don't be afraid. Do not lose heart." (Isaiah 7:4)** The LORD wanted King Ahaz to put his trust in the LORD and so the LORD even offered to give Ahaz a sign to prove that God was with him. Our passage says: **Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."** King Ahaz could have asked for "anything in the deepest depths." He could have asked that right at that moment there be a huge earthquake. He could have asked that the earth suddenly open up in front of him. God would have done it because he wanted to show Ahaz that he was with him. Ahaz could have asked for anything "in the highest heights." Ahaz could have asked that he see at that moment in the sky a huge bolt of lightning. He could have asked that heaven itself be torn open and that he would see into God's heavenly throne room. He could have asked for the most spectacular sign and God would have done it, just to assure Ahaz that he didn't need to be afraid. But sadly instead of responding with faith, Ahaz responds with unbelief. **"But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test'" (Isaiah 7:14).** Ahaz here is pretending to be pious. He is pretending that the reason he doesn't want to ask for a sign was because that would put God to the test. Now putting

God to the test would be saying to God, "God, I'm not going to believe you unless you do this for me." Putting God to the test is dictating terms to God and saying God I'm not going to believe in you unless you do this for me. But here God is offering to give Ahaz a sign. Plus, Ahaz was a terrible idolater. He even sacrificed his own son to a false god named Molech (2 Kings 16:3). It's not very believable that someone like Ahaz would be concerned about putting the LORD to the test. No the real reason that Ahaz won't ask for a sign is unbelief. Ahaz either doesn't believe that can help him, or he is not all that interested in the LORD's help. Isaiah reacts: **"Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?" (Isaiah 7:13)**

Now we are not wicked unbelievers like Ahaz, but when we face a crisis in life, is our first reaction to go to God in prayer? Are we ever tempted to think, "No I'm not going to pray because that won't do any good"? But God is patient with us. He even gives us a sign to prove to us that he is with us: **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."** Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, but God promised that he would give a sign anyway and this sign was more spectacular than anything Ahaz or anyone else could have imagined: **"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."**

The virgin that Isaiah is talking about is the virgin Mary. And the son is the Lord Jesus Christ. And here Jesus is called, "Immanuel." Immanuel comes from two Hebrew words "Immanu" and "el" which means "God is with us." Now these words are literally true of Jesus. Jesus is literally "God with us" because Jesus is God. A few chapters later Isaiah will talk about this child again and he will say, "To us a child is born, to us a son is given and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God." This little child is also the mighty God. Sometimes people talk about a Christmas miracle. Well the true Christmas miracle is that the Mighty God became a little baby. We call this the incarnation. That means that God took on human flesh. Why did God do that? Why did God become a human? To show us that he is with us.

We poor human creatures suffer quite a bit. We fight the bitter cold and we fight cancer. Now Jesus is a king. And sometimes throughout history kings have been seen as detached from their people. The king lives a life of luxury in his palace blissfully ignorant of the misery that the everyday people in his kingdom go through. Jesus isn't like that. Jesus left his throne in heaven to come join people in their suffering. Jesus wasn't born in a palace. He was born in a barn. The King of angels spent his first life on earth where cows eat. We can never say, "God doesn't know what I'm going through." He came down here to earth to be with us.

But he came here to be with us not just so that he can sympathize with us. He came here to be with us in order to defeat our enemies.

One of our great enemies is our sins. Our sins would keep us out of heaven. But the Bible says that Jesus was **born of a woman, born under the law**. Jesus starts at the very beginning of life and from the very beginning he lives the perfectly sinless life we couldn't live and he lets his perfectly sinless life count for us. And then he suffered the penalty for all of our sins. God is with us in that he defeats sin for us. Our gospel said, **"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."**

Another one of our great enemies is death. But God is with us and Jesus defeats death for us. One of the things the virgin birth teaches us is that God creates life where humanly speaking there is no chance of life. It is biologically impossible for a virgin to become pregnant without the seed of a man. But God created life where there was no chance of life and the virgin Mary becomes pregnant with baby Jesus. It is also biologically impossible for a person who has been dead for three days to come back to life. Jesus is in the tomb dead for three days. But God creates life where humanly speaking there is no chance of life. He raises Jesus from dead. On our own we would have no chance of defeating death. But God is with us and he creates life where humanly speaking there is no chance of life.

Another of our great enemies is Satan. But 1 John says that the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. God is with us and if God is for us, who can be against us?

"God with us" is a theme that shows up at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. We heard it in our Gospel for today: **"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). (Matthew 1:23)** It comes up again in chapter 18 when Jesus says to his disciples, **"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20)** And the "God with us" theme is the thought that Matthew leaves us with in the very last words of his book when he records these words of Jesus: **"Surely I am with you always." (Matt 28:20)**

God is still with us today. We are here gathered in Jesus name. Jesus said, "Whenever two or three gather together in my name, there I am with them." Jesus is here in the room with us now. He is with us in baptism. Through baptism we are united to Jesus. He is with us in the Lord's Supper. Jesus says, "This is my body and this is my blood." Jesus is our Immanuel. He is God with us. Since Jesus is with us that means that we are not alone to fight against our enemies of sin, death and the devil. In fact, Jesus has already defeated those enemies for us. If God is for us, who can be against us? Jesus is our Immanuel, our God with us. Let us put our trust in him.

The baby in the manger means that you don't have to do anything alone. Because God is with us. He came down here to earth to be with us as a little baby in the manger. And he still with us today. He said surely I am with you always until the very end of the age. Amen.