**THE SIGN OF IMMANUEL**

Isaiah 7:1-14 (key verses 7:14)

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel*

Brothers and Sisters, in today’s Christmas message titled “The Sign of Immanuel” based on Isaiah 7:1-14 we will learn the meaning of the birth of Jesus Christ in the context of the selected passage. The key verse of the passage reads, *“Therefore the Lord Himself will give youa sign: The virginwill conceive and give birth to a son, andwill call Him Immanuel”* (Isaiah 7:14). As the title of the message and the key verse imply and as you will see, we will learn of the birth of Jesus Christ as a sign, an undeniable sign that occurred about 2000 years ago in history. We will learn that a king by the name “Ahaz” represents more than just himself. He reflects the unbelief and rebellion of humanity against the great love of God. God demonstrated his love for man’s salvation through the sign of Immanuel. It is as significant as the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ because without it these two events would not have occurred. How could He die and resurrect if He was not born? May the sign of Immanuel be in all our hearts so we may conquer any situation in this life. Amen!

The key verse reads, “*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel”* (Isaiah 7:14)*.* Let’s divide into two parts. Verse 14a , *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign”*. The sign was that “*the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, andwill call Him Immanuel”* (14b).To who was this sign to be given? What was it a sign of? And what does this mean for us and every other person in the world we live in? To understand this we would have to look at the passage from the top since the concluding word “Therefore” is used to introduce this sign and prophecy. Further, on what basis did Prophet Isaiah make this conclusion and what can we learn from it?

In opening verses of today’s passage we are introduced to a king by the name Ahaz. This is the person that Prophet Isaiah was referring to when he said, *“Therefore the Lord himself will give* ***you*** *a sign: The virginwill conceive and give birth to a son, andwill call Him Immanuel”*. He also referred to the house of David, that is, of the tribe of Judah, over which he was king. Let us look at verse 1, *“When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it.”* Ahaz was a wicked king of Judah, worshipping other gods and even sacrificing his son in the fire to an idol. One of the final comments about him in 2 Chronicles 28:22-23 read, “***22****In his time of trouble King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the Lord.****23****He offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus, who had defeated him; for he thought, “Since the gods of the kings of Aram have helped them, I will sacrifice to them so they will help me.” But they were his downfall and the downfall of all Israel.*” 2 Kings 16:2-3 says of him, *“****2****Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God.****3****He followed the ways of the [idolatrous] kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the [pagan] nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.”*

These two kings – *Rezin* king of Aram and *Pekah* the king of Isreal – came together and said (as per verse 6), *“Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.”* “Judah” here is the house of David, over which Ahaz was king at the time. Ahaz and the house of David (or Judah) were terrified when they heard of this evil plan by the two kings to ruin them . Look at verse 2, “Now the house of David was told, ‘Aram has allied itself with Ephraim (the northern nation of Israel)’; **so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind**.”

In this moment of fear, God sent the prophet Isaiah to him to **most assuredly** encourage him and to let him know that this plan to invade them will not take place, it will not happen and so he needs to stop worrying and fearing the fierce anger of the two kings. Let's read verse 4 together*, “Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah.”*  **Four times over**, God is assuring Ahaz and encouraging him: “Be careful, keep calm, don't be afraid, do not lose heart.” We can tell that God is helping Ahaz deeply and truly doing His best to counteract the crippling fear in his heart.

However, it is important to note that God was not saying that the two kings were no threat at all or their anger and attack will not be felt at all by his kingdom but that it would be felt but the plan of invasion and destruction won’t happen as the kings intended. That is why God refereed to the two kings as “two smoldering stubs of firewood”. Smouldering stubs of firewood are typically still hot even though the fire is nearly totally out and now these are two, not one. Smouldering is a form of slow, low-temperature combustion that occurs without flames, **and it can maintain significant heat for an extended but really limited period than when there are flames**. Even if there are no visible flames, the interior of the stub can remain dangerously hot. It’s now December time, think of a charcoal that is dying out from the previously fire-blazing braai stand. This charcoal is still hot but you can endure it compared to when it’s blazing with fire and not smouldering.

We can then understand why God after giving Ahaz the promise that the invasion will not happen as planned, He told king Ahaz in verse 9b, ***“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”*** The house of David was going to suffer for their sins of wickedness and idolatry as king Ahaz did evil in the sight of God unlike his father David **but** God in His mercy was going to let a remnant survive the allied attack and invasion of the two kings. This is why God told Prophet Isaiah to take his son **Shear-Jashub** along with him to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer’s Field (verse 3). This was to symbolise and send out the message to Ahaz that only a remnant will survive the enemy’s attack since the name “Shear-Jashub” means *a remnant will return*. So for him to be part of the remnant and stand rather fall, **he will have to stand firm in his faith**. However, he found it difficult to believe. “How will I suffer the attack by the two kings?”, I’m sure he asked himself. Instead of believing God, he was overwhelmed by fear.

God in His love and mercy, responded to his struggle beyond the four-times encouragement ‘Be careful, keep calm, don’t be afraid, do not lose heart’ (verse 4a). Look at verses 10-14, “***10Again*** *the Lord spoke to Ahaz,****11****‘Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.’* ***12But*** *Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.’”*

Ahaz’s refusal to ask for a sign when God wanted to greatly and truly assure him of His promise to him as the king of Judah and to the house of David (Judah) seems **spiritual, morally correct and humble**. However, he refused to ask for a sign because if God showed it to him in a great measure as He intended, Ahaz would be have no excuse to not believe God’s word concerning his salvation and that of the remnant of the house of David over which he was king. That is why in response to this godly or moral guise, Prophet Isaiah rebuked him, *“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?”* and conclusively declared that God will give him and the house of David a great sign **anyway** – a sign hard to not attribute as God’s work and thus have sure faith in God’s promise of salvation. Let's read the key verse together, **“*14Therefore the Lord Himself will give youa sign: The virginwill conceive and give birth to a son, andwill call Him Immanuel.”***

Notice how in the account by Matthew in the New Testament, the same prophecy – that *the virginwill conceive and give birth to a son, andwill call Him Immanuel* – is articulated but when it came to actually naming the son He was given the name **Jesus**. Yes, verse 21 of Matthew 1 says, *“She [the virgin] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name* ***Jesus****,[*[*f*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23166f)*]****because he will save His people from their sins.****”* However, verses 22-23 of the same chapter continue to say, *“****22****All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:****23****“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call* ***him Immanuel[***[***g***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23168g)***] (which means ‘God with us’)****.”* Then verses 24-25 of the same Matthew 1 tell us that the name given to the one who was to be called **Immanuel** was given the name **Jesus**. We actually don’t see anyone call or refer to Jesus by the name Immanuel, at least not directly like “Lord Immanuel”. However, we do see the character of Immanuel and as per the Matthew passage we can see that the name “Immanuel” means “God with us”. If the son to be born to the virgin was to be called Immanuel – “God with us” - then it means the son will not only be the Son of Man but also the Son of God and actually God. **From the key verse then, we can see that the birth of Jesus means God with us**. Yes, the same train of thought is applied by Mathew who indicated in his Gospel that *the virgin would give birth to a Son, and He was to be given the name Jesus,****because*** *He would save His people from their sins.* The reason why He was given the name Jesus was because He would save His people from their sins. And since the one to be named Immanuel was named Jesus, as we have already seen through Matthew 1, **then to believe in Jesus is to believe in Immanuel**. **Therefore, to believe in Jesus who is Immanuel is to inherently believe that God is with us against our sins.** Jesus who was to be born and called Immanuel is the Divine One who came into this world to be with us to save us from our own sins. This is the son the prophecy spoke about when it said in second part of the key verse (i.e., 14b): “*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, andwill call Him Immanuel.”* However, we are told that this prophecy is **a sign**.

This sign of “a virgin conceiving and giving birth to a son and the son being called Immanuel” is inexcusable to not believe because it is biologically impossible for a virgin to conceive, let alone giving birth! Also, what are the odds that the conception and birth will lead to a son – a male child – specifically let alone predict how He will be called? As previously stated, there is nowhere in the Bible that we see the exact name “Immanuel” after the birth of Jesus. However, we do see many **indirect instances** where He is called Immanuel. For example, in John 3 we read, “Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. **2**He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Nicodemus as per his conscience and in his own language acknowledged without actually saying to Jesus, who was beyond the greatness of the miracle-working prophets recorded in the Scriptures, that He was “God with us”. In the Book of John, the Pharisees could not justifiably pin Jesus down on His life as ‘God with us’ (Immanuel) when He responded to their exclamation in John 8, “**57**You are not yet fifty years old…and you have seen Abraham!”, saying “Very truly I tell you…before Abraham was born, **I am!**”

Besides it is a great sign that He will be called Immanuel because it meant someone on earth had to live up to that standard of “God with us” **and a great figure called Jesus did that for at least 30 years!** It is written of the Lord Jesus, in Hebrews 4:14-15, “***14****Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,[*[*f*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%204&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30029f)*] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.****15****For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses,* ***but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.***” "The sign of Immanuel is the sign of God being born as a human being, subject to human experiences such as the need for food, drink, clothing, and subject to the feeling of temptation, **just like us.** **All of these, yet without sin.** All of these and yet living to very standard of holiness and purity that God deems perfect. The sign of Immanuel is the undeniable and perfect sign that God would dwell among us sinners because of His great love. The sign of Immanuel signifies that true victory, and therefore our salvation, would be accomplished. Remember a sign is not necessarily the fulfilment of the word or promise but a clear indication or confirmation that should logically be undoubtable that the word or promise of God will surely be fulfilled.

The word of the Lord that the house of David will be saved was confirmed through the sign –in other words evidence – of Immanuel, Jesus the Son of God. God has already given this sign of Immanuel through Jesus who was born to the virgin Mary and lived a life characteristic of “God with us”. Even Islam acknowledges the miraculous birth of a son through a virgin. So, in calling Him Immanuel, you would need to objectively view His life, as the Apostles, Nicodemus, and many others did, and acknowledge, as the people did, that He was surely the Son of God—even before the resurrection, which ultimately served as proof that He is indeed the Son of God (Romans 1:1-4; Acts 17:31).

The question then is: Do I truly believe God’s Gospel concerning salvation through His precious Son, Jesus Christ? God gave Ahaz, whom He assured not to lose heart in the face of the coming destruction, the message: *"If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."* Despite Ahaz’s faithlessness and excuse-filled response, God decisively declared that He would give him the sign of Immanuel, so that he would have no excuse not to believe. This is God’s great love. It is God’s great love because, like Ahaz, He gave us the life of Immanuel on earth – something undeniably true and tangible. It is undeniable in history that around 2,000 years ago, such a person lived on the very earth we inhabit. Do I have any excuse against the sign of Immanuel—against God’s proof that He indeed sent His Son into the world for my salvation?

Between 2015 and 2016, I rejected the Gospel message from a friend at least three times, using the excuse that I was still young and needed to enjoy life. By "enjoy life," I meant indulging in alcohol, pursuing girls, and one day embracing the “freedom” of adulthood—to spend money however I wanted and live without parental restrictions. Although I rejected his message to become born again, I knew deep down that whatever this "born again" thing was, it was good because this friend of mine was a good kid—unlike me, the naughty one. In hindsight, I was acknowledging in my conscience that God was with him because of his good works, and internally, rather than outwardly, I glorified God. If you truly believe in Jesus—Immanuel—you will let your light shine before men so they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Like Ahaz, I didn’t want God’s sign because, if I had it, I would have no excuse not to repent and believe the good news—that sin and death no longer had to prevail in my life if I truly believed in Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Are you like Ahaz? Do you know deep down that God has spoken concerning the victory you can have over a sinful and detestable life, but still refuse to be fully convinced, hiding behind moral justifications like, “I’m not killing anyone,” or “It’s not like I’m hurting anyone”? The Lord God has given you a sign. It is a recorded fact—not only in Christianity but in Islam too—that Jesus was a child born and given the name Jesus. As it is written (Matthew 1:22-23): *“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ (which means ‘God with us’).”*

**Conclusion:**
We learnt of a God who in His love sees to it that His word to humanity is inexcusable or unjustifiable to not believe – even amid real fear – and so the birth of Jesus and His embodiment and representation of the practical meaning of the name Immanuel is a sure sign to the world that God’s salvation work through Jesus is true because the son born and called Immanuel in various forms grew and lived in the world we live in for a significant time of about 30 years before He could die and rise from the dead. Hence, the birth of Jesus who is Immanuel is as significant as His death and resurrection. *If we do not stand firm in our faith in this sure sign of Immanuel, we will not stand at all to obtain salvation. It is by grace we are saved, through faith which comes through the word of God concerning His love for us through His Son Jesus Christ – Immanuel ‘God with us’.*May God help all of us overcome our unjustified unbelief in the good news of peace between us and God through Immanuel (God with us). **Amen.**