

**December 11, 2011**  
**God With Us**  
**Isaiah 7:10-16**

I'm only speaking for myself but there are times when we find it hard to trust God to look after me. I mean I know God loves me, but sometimes I wonder if He's really there for me.

**Anyone else fit that pattern?**

**Do you ever think your situation is so bad there's no way out.** Do you ever feel it's hopeless. Or maybe there are other times when we think we know the best solution to our problems so we don't bother to ask God for help.

If you have or have had anyone of these three statements you're in good company. They were true of A-haz, -- as Jerusalem was surrounded by the armies of Israel and Syria. It looked like Jerusalem was doomed. The people were starving ---- **there didn't seem to be much hope unless they were rescued by another nation.** In fact A-haz had it in his mind to form an alliance with Egypt or Assyria, thinking that would solve their problems.

**Isaiah 7:10-16**

**<sup>10</sup> Moreover the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, <sup>11</sup> "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above." <sup>12</sup> But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" <sup>13</sup> Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, O house of David! *Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?* <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. <sup>15</sup> Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. <sup>16</sup> For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.**

Unfortunately we are like Ahaz. Too often when we make short term decisions overlooking the long term consequences. **If Ahaz formed an alliance with, some nation, they'd lose their independence, The nation of Judea would be handed over to a pagan king. Jerusalem would become a secular city just like any other city in the world.**

What do you do when you're faced with some impending disaster? Do you use your own political savvy, your own applied logic, Your own reason or wealth. Do you try to find a way out by yourself ---- **OR do you ask God to intervene?** It's difficult isn't it, because either may be appropriate. **God promises to help us, but he also tells us – expects us to do our part.**

In the case of Ahaz, God decides to send Isaiah to speak to him and say basically: **"Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart."** Ahaz could relax in the face of this threat, because God was with him. This was God's city and God wasn't going to let these enemies take it captive. In fact if you read the entire story, he tells him that Israel will be gone within 65 years. That's what happens when you play politics with a greater military power, and abandon God. In the meantime Ahaz should trust in the Lord and ask for his help.

**That sounds good doesn't it?** What is there to worry about? Just get down on your knees and pray. God has already sent his prophet to assure him of his help. He tells him to ask for a sign. That's what Gideon did when he wasn't sure. And God gave him a sign - twice. God understands our lack of confidence at times like this.

But did you see how Ahaz responds? He doesn't want to put the Lord to the test! God has gone

out of his way to help His people and their king doesn't want to bother God. Perhaps he thinks this is a trap that Isaiah is setting for him. **Or perhaps he's just too scared to step out of his comfort zone and trust God rather than his own political maneuvering.**

Well, Isaiah isn't going to let him get away with that. He may be the king but this is God's city, God's people. So He speaks a word of prophecy: **"A young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."** The naming of a child is a common technique in the prophets to bring a message to God's people. Hosea uses it to warn them of God's judgment, then to promise restoration. **Here the child is to be named Immanuel, that is, "God is with us",** to assure them that God is ready to stand with them against their enemies. **And if God is with us who can stand against us. (Romans 8:31)**

In the end the words Isaiah spoke came true. Both Israel and Syria were taken over by Assyria. Even Jerusalem was threatened, but it wasn't defeated because God protected them. That would happen later.

But of course the history of Israel isn't actually our focus today. Today we're interested in the way that prophecy had its outworking in the birth of Jesus. As we read in the passage from **Matthew 1**, Matthew identifies this child with that prophecy of **Isaiah 7**:

**"They shall call His name Emmanuel," which means, 'God is with us.'"**

**What does it mean that with Jesus' birth God is with us?** Is it only the incarnation. That God has come in human form to live among?

Here is a child who is both fully human and fully divine at the same time? This is a unique, one only event in human history. **The word of God has become flesh and dwelt among us.** But it's clearly more than that. **Matthew tells us that this child is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.** A lot of water has passed under the bridge since Isaiah's day. At Matthew's writing, Jerusalem is no longer under attack from Syria, now it's in the hands of the Romans. So things are even worse than they were. **If the people needed to know that God was with them, it was now.** And they needed to know not just that he was with them but that he'd protect them, save them. Here's the interesting bit though. In Isaiah's day the prophecy meant that God would save Jerusalem from its enemies who were camped outside the gates.

But this savior who is born in Bethlehem isn't coming to save the nation or the city from its enemies. In fact in a mere 70 years time Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Jews driven out of it almost for good. He's coming to save his people from their sins. The angel gives him the name Jesus for that reason.

Can you see what the name Immanuel has to do with that?

**This child born in Bethlehem, as God with us, is a sign that the separation we experience from God is coming to an end.**

**What separates us from God? It's our sin isn't it? Jesus has come to deal with our sin; to save us from it and to enable us to be restored to full communion with God.** God is with us, not to make us feel safer, not to give us warm fuzzes, but rather to save us from the reality of the judgment we deserve.

**God is with us in a new way, a way that allows us to be with God.**

It's a complex idea isn't it? Jesus is both a sign of God's protection and the means of that protection. Jesus both assures us that God is fulfilling his promise to restore the creation and is the means by which God brings about that restoration to reality.

But what about right now? We look back on the events of the first century and we know them

well. We know that God has brought about the salvation he promised in Jesus. We know Jesus grew up and chose 12 disciples and in the end died on a cross, but then rose again. And that might be all we get out of a passage like this. But that would be to miss, again, the deeper significance of this name, Immanuel. Because this baby Jesus continues to be a sign for us, doesn't he? **He continues to act as a reminder, as a token of God's ongoing love and protection.** When we look back to the birth of Jesus, and to his death and resurrection, we're reminded again and again and again, that God is mighty to save.

**We read about Ahaz hearing about the alliance of Syria and Israel and being afraid that they might come and defeat him and it all seems such a long time ago.** But really, his situation isn't that much different from what many of us experience. There are times when it seems like everything is stacked against us; when it feels like the weight of the world is on us. Like Ahaz, we might even refuse to ask God for help. Even as Christians we can feel like we're on our own; pitted against forces beyond our ability to resist, let alone overcome.

**Each year around this time we see the forces of political correctness trying to limit the celebration of Christ's birth and turn it into the holiday season instead.** In various places Nativity scenes are banned. Even the word Christmas isn't politically correct – but somehow Winter Festival carols just don't set much of a mood for me.

Then for some Santa Clause is the focus of Christmas celebrations rather than Jesus, and I could go on.

**Of course many people even in the church wonder what's the issue is.** We can feel very small and very alone.

**The Good News of Christmas is We're not alone.**

**We're not facing insurmountable opposition. God is with us.** The Word became flesh – God came to earth in the person of Jesus. **He lived as one of us.** He died and rose again. And in his last few hours with the disciples before his death he promised them this:

**John 14: 16-18 “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. ‘I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.’”**

Then before he ascended to the Father he gave this promise: “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

**Immanuel is still with us.** His Holy Spirit dwells within each and every who has ask Jesus to live in them. **When He is with us there is no need ever be afraid.**

Paul puts it like this in

**Romans 8: 31-32 “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”**

God promises to remain with us. He's given up His only Son for us. God has done everything necessary for us to live forever with Him, It's not up to us to ask Him into our lives and live for Him?

So let me encourage you today to have confidence, not in your own ability to overcome those who oppose the gospel, but confidence in the God who sent His only Son as both a sign of His

love for us and as the means by which that love could bring about its purpose for His people. Have confidence in the God who continues to be with us through all the trials of life. Maybe this is the time when you and I can give God the gift of more of us to His service.

In the midst of all the noise in the world – let's hear Jesus speaking to us... let's hear the sounds of Christmas in our hearts.

Check out this clip

<http://www.angelfire.com/ak2/intelligencerreport/stethoscope.html>