

Isaiah 7:10-14

What's In A Name? Lots of people today think that names are very **important**. For example, some people insist on buying **name brand** clothing, because they think that a certain **name** insures the **quality** of the product. But the great playwright, William **Shakespeare** didn't think a name was too meaningful at all. In the play he wrote called, *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet says, "What's in a **name**? A **rose** by any **other** name would smell as **sweet**." In other words, the **name** of something doesn't necessarily determine its **qualities** or **characteristics**. A rose will **always** be a rose - no matter **what** you call it. However, when the characteristics of something or someone have actually been used to **determine** their name, **then** that name becomes much more **significant**. We have many such examples in the Bible: "Adam" means **man**, "Eve" means **life**, "Satan" means **enemy**, and "Jesus" means **Savior**. The name in our text today is also highly significant. It is the name **Immanuel**. There are actually **two miracles** which surround the coming of Immanuel. One is that He would be a **virgin's** son, while the other is that He would be **God's** Son.

Isaiah is the prophet who brings us the comforting message that Immanuel will **come**. Let's listen once again to what he said. Our text begins, "*The Lord spoke to Ahaz again. He said, 'Ask for a **sign** from the LORD your God. Ask for it either in the depths below or in the heights above.'* But Ahaz responded, 'I will **not** ask. I will **not test** the LORD.'" Who **was** this Ahaz - and **why** should he ask the LORD for a sign? Actually, Ahaz was the King of **Judah**, the Southern Kingdom. As it turns out, both he and his people were **terrified** because of a recent political development. You may remember that a couple of weeks ago, when we **also** studied a text from the Book of Isaiah; I mentioned that **Israel**, the **Northern** Kingdom, was politically on its last leg, and would soon be **destroyed** by the Assyrians. But **before** that time, the King of Israel had made an **alliance** with the King of **Syria**, in order to try to keep his nation alive. The plan was to invade **Judah** (their brothers to the south), and to **divide it** between the two countries - thus **strengthening** both Syria **and** Israel. But **God** would not allow this to happen. The first time God spoke to Ahaz through Isaiah He said, "*(The destruction of Judah) will **not** succeed. It shall **not** take place.*"

Unfortunately, Ahaz was still not **convinced**. So, in order to **reassure** King Ahaz and the people of Judah that the LORD would **deliver** them from their enemies to the north, God invited Ahaz to ask for a **sign**. The LORD wanted to give them **visible proof** of His presence and power. Just **imagine** it - Ahaz could have asked for **any** miracle of his choice as a sign of God's faithfulness. Such an opportunity

was even **better** than having the three wishes from the genie in Aladdin's legendary lamp - because God's invitation was not a mere **legend** - it was **real**. Nevertheless Ahaz said, "*I will **not** ask: I will not **test** the LORD.*"

Outwardly this sounds very **pious**, but in reality Ahaz didn't **want** to ask for a sign because he didn't **want** the LORD's help. He had already made **other** plans. If the King of **Israel** could bring in outside help, then **Ahaz** could go one better. He would bring in a **bigger** and more **powerful** nation to help Judah - and he **did**. The Book of Kings tells us that Ahaz had contacted King **Tiglath-Pileser** (sometimes called King Pul) from the country of **Assyria**, not to be confused with **Syria**. Assyria was the world's most powerful nation at that time. Ahaz even took the gold and silver vessels out of the LORD's **temple**, and sent them as a **gift** to Tiglath-Pileser asking for **protection** in return. Although Ahaz **received** the help he was seeking, Assyria could not be **trusted**. How **ironic** it is that Assyria was the same nation which **ignored** this alliance, and actually **conquered** Judah about 100 years later!

But, getting back to Ahaz's pious remark about **testing** the LORD - was he **right**? **Would** he have been testing the LORD by asking for a miraculous **sign**? Of course not. God **wanted** him to ask - God had graciously **invited** him to ask. Asking for a sign under **those** circumstances would have been an evidence of **faith** and **trust** in the LORD. But as we have already **seen**, Ahaz didn't **have** that kind of trust in the LORD. He chose to look to an **earthly** power instead.

Even today we need to be able to distinguish between **testing** God, and doing what God **invites** us to do. For example, are we testing God when we ask Him to give us a strong **faith**, or to help us bear our **burdens**, or to forgive our **sins**? Of course not. God has **invited** us to ask Him for such things, just as dear children ask their dear Father. In fact, if we would **not** ask Him, the LORD would be very **disappointed** with us. Once again Ahaz serves as a **bad** example. Isaiah wrote, "*Is it not enough for you to test the patience of **men**? Will you test the patience of my **God** as well?*" The unbelieving actions of Ahaz had undoubtedly gone on for quite some time, for our God is **patient** and **slow** to anger - but Ahaz was right at the edge of trying even **God's** patience! Let all individuals **beware** who dare to try the patience of the LORD - to push Him to the **limit** by flagrantly disobeying the **will** of God, even **after** that will has been clearly **revealed** to him.

That's **right** - Ahaz **almost** reached the limit - but not **quite**. Since Ahaz **refused** to ask for a specific sign God said, "*I will give you one **anyway** - a sign which will be not only for **you**, but which will be for the entire **nation**.*" The sign would be **Immanuel**. We read, "*The **virgin** will conceive and give birth to a Son,*

and name Him Immanuel.” Imagine that - a **virgin** would give birth to a child. The Hebrew word which is translated virgin always designates an **unmarried** woman. Nevertheless, it would not have been too unusual in **Isaiah’s** day or in our **own** day, for a woman to conceive a child **outside** of the estate of marriage. But God is **not** talking about an **illegitimate** child. By these words, He means that this Child will have no biological human **father**. Now, without going into great **detail**, that is (humanly speaking) a physical **impossibility**. However, with God **all** things are possible. This **miraculous** event would take place only **once**, and it would mark the coming of an **extraordinary** Person - one who came with **divine** power and **divine** purity - one who was **unstained** by the blemish of a **sinful** human nature. The LORD Himself **chose** this special sign to mark the birth of the **Messiah**. He would be **Immanuel** - which means, God with us.

These were truly **comforting** words for Isaiah and the other believers in Judah at that time. It was an **encouraging** sign for them, because even though they were living in a time of severe **tension** between the nations, they could be sure that God would not **cast them off**, nor would He allow the allied countries of Syria and Israel to **destroy** them. This nation would remain until the promise was **fulfilled** and **God Himself** would come and **live** with His people. However, for **Ahaz** and those who refused to put their trust in the LORD, these words were **not** comforting at all. They would be words of **judgment**. For the same God whom they had **rejected**, would be **living** among them, **hearing** their words, and **seeing** their actions. And the all-powerful God would most certainly have His **retribution**.

The question is, how do **we** see this promise of Immanuel? Our national situation is really not too **different** from the one in which Ahaz and his people found themselves. Although America is hardly defenseless or on its last leg politically, nevertheless, there is much **unrest** and **uncertainty** among the nations of the world, **including** our own. Terrorist attacks around the world; and the recent wars in **Iraq** and **Afghanistan** come to mind immediately. Then there’s **North Korea** and **Iran** - what’s going to happen with them? Where will we **turn** for help and answers? Will we only depend on **human** advisors, **political** alliances, and our own **military** strength - or will we turn to the **LORD** for help? No matter how **outwardly** strong we may appear to be on our own, God’s words to King Ahaz are still effective, *“If you do not stand firm in **faith**, you will not stand at **all!**”*

Today you and I can look **back** and hear once again about the **first** coming of Immanuel. As Christians we can **rejoice** in the fact that God has been with us in the **past**, and that He will continue to be with us in the **future** - in His **Word** and **Sacraments**. God **alone** can deliver us from all **evil**, and as His **children**, that is

what we are **waiting** for. We are waiting for the **final** coming of Immanuel, when **God** will be **with** us and **we** will share in His **glory** forever in heaven. We pray for that day to come **soon**. **Come**, Immanuel - come into our **minds**, and **hearts**, and **lives** today; that we may always strive to serve You **faithfully** in our **thoughts**, in our **words**, and in our **actions**. Amen.