

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY

18 December

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

HYMNS: 6 28 22 632

THE LIGHTING OF THE FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE

M: The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a Son,

C: and she will call His name 'Immanuel' which means, 'God is with us.'

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have sent Your Son Jesus to be with us and to save us. Teach us to live as Your people, and to serve you joyfully. Amen.

INTROIT: Psalm 24

The earth is the LORD's, and what fills it, the world, and those who live in it. For He Himself has laid its foundations on the seas, and set it firmly on the waters.

Who may go up to the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place?

The person who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to what is false, or who has not sworn deceitfully.

He will receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from God, who saves him.

These are the kinds of people who seek Him, who seek Your face, O God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, you gates, and be lifted up, you everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may come in!

Who is this, the King of Glory? The LORD, strong and mighty. The LORD, mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, you gates! Lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in!

Who is He, who is this, the King of Glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of Glory.

COLLECT: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins that weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS: Isaiah 7:10-17 The virgin will have a Son.

Romans 1:1-7 Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Matthew 1:18-25 Her Child is from the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 7:10-17

¹⁰ The LORD spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹ “Claim a miraculous sign for yourself from the LORD, your God! Make the request a deep one or make it high up above!”

¹² However, Ahaz answered, “I shall not ask for one. I shall not put the LORD to the test.”

¹³ Isaiah said: “Listen now, family of David! Is it too little for you to exhaust the patience of men, that you also exhaust the patience of my God? ¹⁴ Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a miraculous sign: **Look! The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a Son and will call His name ‘Immanuel.’** ¹⁵ He will eat curds and honey when He knows how to reject what is evil and choose what is good. ¹⁶ Indeed, before the Boy knows how to reject what is evil and choose what is good, the land that you dread because of its two kings will be deserted. ¹⁷ The LORD will bring on you, on your people and on the family of your father such days as have not come since Ephraim broke away from Judah. He will bring the king of Assyria.

Romans 1:1-7

¹ Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart for the Good News of God. ² He promised this Gospel in advance through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures. ³ It is about His Son, who was born a descendant of David according to His human nature, ⁴ but who, according to His holy divinity, was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead. He is Jesus Christ, our Lord. ⁵ Through Him and for His name’s sake, we have received the grace of holding the apostolic office among all the Gentiles, so that they may be obedient by believing. ⁶ Among them, you also have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. ⁷ To all who are in Rome whom God loves and has called to be His holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ This is how Jesus Christ was born. His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph. However, before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph, her husband, was an honourable man and, because he did not want to disgrace her, he intended to divorce her secretly. ²⁰ After Joseph had thought about it, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take your wife Mary home with you! For what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you shall name Him ‘Jesus’! For He will save His people from their sins.”

²² All this happened to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet:

²³ **“Look! The virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and they will name Him ‘Immanuel’”** (which is translated, “**God-With-Us**”).

²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did what the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He took Mary home as his wife, ²⁵ but did not have relations with her until she gave birth to a Son. Joseph gave Him the name “Jesus.”

*Therefore the Lord Himself
shall give you a sign;
Behold, a virgin shall conceive,
and bear a son,
and shall call His name
Immanuel.*

Isaiah 7: 14

ISAIAH HAD FORETOLD IT; JESUS HAS FULFILLED IT
Sermon for the 4th Sunday in Advent, 2022
Isaiah 7:10-17

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our First Reading from before, Isaiah 7:10-17: **The LORD spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹ “Claim a miraculous sign for yourself from the LORD, your God! Make the request a deep one or make it high up above!”**

¹² **However, Ahaz answered, “I shall not ask for one. I shall not put the LORD to the test.”**

¹³ **Isaiah said: “Listen now, family of David! Is it too little for you to exhaust the patience of men, that you also exhaust the patience of my God? ¹⁴ Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a miraculous sign: Look! The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a Son and will call His name ‘Immanuel.’ ¹⁵ He will eat curds and honey when He knows how to reject what is evil and choose what is good. ¹⁶ Indeed, before the Boy knows how to reject what is evil and choose what is good, the land that you dread because of its two kings will be deserted. ¹⁷ The LORD will bring on you, on your people and on the family of your father such days as have not come since Ephraim broke away from Judah. He will bring the king of Assyria.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

No other Old Testament is quoted as often in the New Testament than the prophet Isaiah. This is due to the breadth of topics he covered and to his frequent descriptions of *the coming Messiah and His kingdom*, which find fulfilment in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Isaiah prophesies so often about the coming Messiah that some commentators have called his prophecy the “*Fifth Gospel*.”

Today, we again hear Isaiah's prophecy concerning the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. The gospel writer Matthew confirms this when he writes: *"All this happened to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Look! The virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and they will name Him 'Immanuel'" (which is translated, "God-With-Us")"* (Matthew 1:22-23). Clearly, the birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy. Jesus is *"God-With-Us"* in the most profound way. Isaiah had foretold it; Jesus has fulfilled it.

But there was also another "Immanuel - God with us" situation going on back at the time of Isaiah himself, some 700 years before Christ. When we find out a little more about that, we shall gain greater insight into what the birth of Christ means for us today.

In the year 735 B.C., the nation of Israel had been split into a divided kingdom, north and south, for almost 200 years. The northern kingdom was called Israel, and the southern kingdom was Judah. The king of the southern kingdom was a man named Ahaz. Ahaz was a descendant of the house of David, from whom came the line of kings.

The southern kingdom, Judah, was being pressured by the northern kingdom, Israel, to join them in an alliance with Syria to withstand the nation of Assyria, which was seeking to expand its empire. Israel and Syria wanted Judah to join them in opposing Assyria, but if Judah did not want to join them, then Israel and Syria could attack Judah, which they were on the verge of doing. So, the message of Israel and Syria to Judah was, "If you don't join us, we'll take you over."

As you can imagine, this worried the king of Judah, Ahaz. Isaiah wrote, *"The heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind"* (7:2). What should Ahaz do? Should he rely on a political alliance to hold off Assyria? But if he doesn't, what will Israel and Syria do to him and his people? Ahaz seemed caught between a rock and a hard place.

In steps the prophet Isaiah, who has a word from the LORD for King Ahaz. It's a word of assurance but also a word of rebuke and a word of warning. Isaiah first tells Ahaz, *"Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your*

heart be faint” (7:4). Although Israel and Syria were pressuring King Ahaz, they would fail in their threat against him. The LORD God said, “*It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.*” Listen, Ahaz, “*If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all*” (7:7, 9).

Then the LORD had more to say to Ahaz, and that’s where our text picks it up: “**The LORD spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹ “Claim a miraculous sign for yourself from the LORD, your God! Make the request a deep one or make it high up above!”**

¹² However, Ahaz answered, “I shall not ask for one. I shall not put the LORD to the test.”

At first, it sounds like Ahaz is being pious by not asking for a sign. But he’s just trying to avoid having his lack of faith exposed, and the LORD Himself is telling Ahaz to *go ahead and ask for a sign*.

So Isaiah continues: “**Listen now, family of David! Is it too little for you to exhaust the patience of men, that you also exhaust the patience of my God? ¹⁴ Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a miraculous sign: Look! The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a Son and will call His name ‘Immanuel.’**” Ahaz had not believed the word of the LORD, so the LORD would give Ahaz a sign to confirm what He’d been saying.

The LORD had been saying that the threat of Israel and Syria would not stand, and this sign would confirm it. A young woman would become pregnant and have a son, and His name will be “Immanuel.” Now that in itself is not so remarkable. Women get pregnant and have sons all the time. Even the name “Immanuel” is not so strange. In Hebrew, it means “*God with us*,” and there are lots of names like that in the Old Testament, names with “God” or “the Lord” built into the name. So not much of a definitive sign so far.

But Isaiah continues. He tells Ahaz that before the child has reached a certain age, a young age, the threat now facing Judah, the threat that looks so ominous at the moment, will be gone. “**The land that you dread because of its two kings will be deserted.**” Jerusalem will not be taken. Judah will be spared. That will be the sign confirming what Isaiah is saying now, and Ahaz will see this come to pass within the next few years. And that is exactly

what happened. Israel and Syria did not succeed in their plan against Judah, but were defeated by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

But then, look out, Ahaz! Assyria would not stop with knocking off Israel and Syria but would be coming after Judah! Like a mighty river overflowing its banks, Assyria was going to proceed farther south and reach the walls of Jerusalem. Isaiah put it this way: **“The LORD will bring on you, on your people and on the family of your father such days as have not come since Ephraim broke away from Judah. He will bring the king of Assyria.”**

And again, that is what came to pass. Assyria threatened Jerusalem in 701 B.C., and at that time, Isaiah had to counsel the next king of Judah, *Hezekiah*, to trust in the Lord and not in political or military alliances. Hezekiah heeded the word of Isaiah, and that threat again was lifted.

A hundred years later, though, another threat came along, and that was the Babylonians. They did take the people captive and took them as exiles to Babylon. You are familiar with the Advent hymn: “O come, O come, Immanuel.” The first three lines of that hymn go: “*O come, O come, Immanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here.*” Through these words, that hymn is alluding to the Babylonian Captivity. Transfer that to the church, to us, as we sit in this vale of tears and wait for the Lord to come and set us free, and that’s the connection.

What’s the point in all of this? It is to trust in the Lord and not in any human measures of strength. It is to trust in the Lord, and not in man, not in armies, not in self, to be our deliverance. Psalm 146 teaches us, “*Do not trust in noble people, in a descendant of Adam, who cannot save! When his spirit departs, he will return to his earth. On that day his plans will perish. Blessed is the one who has the God of Jacob for his help! His hope is in the LORD, his God*” (v. 3-5).

“*Immanuel,*” “*God with us.*” God being with us is all we need. “*Immanuel.*” That is the word Ahaz should have heard and heeded back in 735 B.C. Now fast-forward to just months before the birth of Christ. There is a man named Joseph, and he seems stuck between a rock and a hard place. The woman he’s planning to marry, Mary - has turned up pregnant, and Joseph knows

he's not the father. So what can he do? He decides to break it off. Obviously, to him, she's been fooling around with somebody else.

But such is not the case. The Lord comes with a word for Joseph. It's a word of assurance. Mary has not been fooling around. She is still a virgin. She is pregnant in a unique, one-of-a-kind way by the Holy Spirit. Mary is part of the fulfilment of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy: **“Look! The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a Son and will call His name ‘Immanuel.’”**

This son that Mary will bear will be the ultimate *“God with us,”* the ultimate *“Immanuel.”* His name will be “Jesus,” meaning “Saviour,” *“for He will save His people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:21). *“Their sins.”* That is the big threat facing people. Not Syria or Assyria or Babylon or an unfaithful fiancée. But sins, our sins, even to this day. That hasn't changed. We still need saving. We still need deliverance because of our sins. That's what separates us from God. That's what leads to death, the big death of eternal damnation. Where are we going to look for help with that?

Don't pull an Ahaz. Don't look for sources of help that cannot save or deliver. Only one can, and it is the Lord Himself, this “Immanuel,” this “God with us” one. That's Jesus, the son of Mary. He is God in the flesh; come to save us. He has come to be with us, God with us, in our midst to save us.

Jesus, Immanuel, saves us from our sins. He does this by offering Himself up as the sacrifice for our sins. This is why the Son of God had to be born in the flesh, to live as our brother and to fulfil all righteousness and to suffer and die in our stead, in place of sinners like us. Jesus has done this for us in order to save us! He is Immanuel, God with us, now risen from the dead and living and reigning to all eternity. And He is coming back to rescue us from all evil and to raise us from the dead. We have His word on it. We have His name on it, His name placed upon us in Holy Baptism. We are secure in Him.

Dear friends, do you ever find yourself stuck between a rock and a hard place? Then remember - no threat can overpower you. No threat can shake you like trees in the wind. Trust in Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. Isaiah had foretold it; Jesus has fulfilled it. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Heavenly Father, all things in heaven and on earth reveal Your glory and show clearly what You have done. But we now thank You in particular for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the salvation You have provided for all people through His sacrificial obedience. We confidently bring our prayers before You in His loving name.

We stand before You with repentant hearts. We acknowledge our many sins. Forgive us for Jesus' sake. Make us more alert to both right and wrong before You. Deliver us from our pet sins, and from those that continually cause us to fall. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, purify the words we speak, and guide everything we do in obedience to Jesus. Heal and renew us. Assure us of Your forgiveness through Jesus' holy, priestly work, that we may possess Your peace, which is beyond all human understanding.

We pray for all people everywhere. Let Your Holy Spirit rule in every home and school, in every shop and office, and in every area of labour and industry. Open the eyes of the nations that people everywhere may see Your glory. Overthrow those who oppose the Gospel of Your Son. Support all who are persecuted for His sake, and prosper all who love Your truth. Be with the fatherless, the homeless, and the comfortless, and lead them to trust You in all their troubles. Send them help that will draw them to You, and will lead them to confess the name of Jesus.

Make Your face to shine on the wounded in spirit, the sick in mind, and the distressed in heart. Protect and bless with Your presence all travellers, and all who are away from home in any service or calling. We pray for captives and prisoners, for the depressed and the lonely, and for all in danger of body and soul. Comfort them with Your presence and help. Be gracious to those among us who are sick and aged, to those who are suffering, to those who are bereaved and those who are dying. Give them all the perfect peace that Jesus has won for them.

Make our hearts a fit dwelling-place for Your Son, that we may know the joy of His presence, and the blessing of following in His steps. And finally give us the glorious crown You have promised to those who cling to Him in firm and patient faith, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Bible is Clear

The Apostle Paul wrote, “*If a trumpet makes a sound that is uncertain, who will get ready for battle?*” (1 Cor. 14:8). Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to interpret their speaking in tongues, or it would not edify the church. In a similar way, if the Bible did not give a clear message, how could it present to us the terrible nature of our sin and the incomparably great message of our salvation in Jesus Christ? The Bible is clear in its message. The psalmist calls God’s Word “*a lamp to my feet and a light for my path*” (Psalm 119:105). Anyone who has walked the rocky ground or passed by the steep drop-offs of the wilderness of Judah in Israel knows the importance of being able to see where you are going. Any misstep could lead to serious injury or death. You need a lamp to light your way at night. God’s Word is our lamp for faith and life. It clearly teaches us what God expects of us and what He has done for our salvation.

In speaking of the clarity of the Bible, we distinguish between an outward and an inner clarity. The Bible is outwardly clear. Its language is capable of being understood by people who hear it. Even the rankest of unbelievers can understand the message contained in John 3:16. I have heard men speak who had an extraordinary knowledge of the Bible. However, they did not believe what it said. It is only the Holy Spirit who can work an inner clarity in the heart, which the Bible calls enlightenment (Eph. 1:18). Thus, the Bible is simple enough for a child to understand, but so deep that a theologian can puzzle over it.

The Bible is clear in what it says. This does not mean, however, that every statement will be understood by us. Peter related that some things in Paul’s writings were difficult to understand (2 Peter 3:16). Some statements in the book of Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation are difficult for us to understand. The overall message is clear, but we may not be able to comprehend every detail of a vision. For example, Martin Luther, in his commentary on Zechariah from 1527, wrote about chapter 14: “*Here, in this chapter, I give up. For I am not sure what the prophet is talking about... I want to add my thought too, even though it is not sufficiently certain either in many places, and ultimately I will yield the mastery to the Holy Spirit.*”

Where we face difficulties like this, the problem is not in the clarity of Scripture. The problem lies with our sin-clouded understanding of Scripture.

Children's Message:

Everywhere we go we see signs. We see signs on large billboards on the side of the road, signs on TV and the internet, signs at school, and signs around the neighbourhood.

Signs are very helpful. They help us understand what's going on and how we should act.

Did you know that there is a sign that we find in our church? It is a sign that stands out as particularly helpful and important.



Do you want to see this sign? Then you need to look toward the front of the church, on the inside. This sign is the **baptismal font** where have been baptised into

God's family. Did you know that Baptism is a sign? It's a sign from God. Do you know what this sign tells us? It tells us that God loves us. It tells us that God is always with us. It tells us that we belong to Jesus.

In fact, Jesus Himself is a sign from God. In our reading from the Old Testament this morning, Isaiah 7:10-17, God said He would send a sign. That sign was a baby who would be born for us. And that baby, Jesus, was born in a way that was a special miracle of God. God caused Jesus' mother, Mary, to have baby Jesus even though she and Joseph hadn't come together yet. And, you know, God sent Jesus into the world to die on the cross for us. So when we see Jesus in the manger, we see that God loves the world so much that He was willing to send His Son to save it. When we see the baptismal font, we remember that we have been baptised into Christ. Baptism is the sign that God loves you and me. It's God's personal sign to you that He will always be with you to love and forgive and save you.



Every time you see this baptismal font, remember God's promise. Remember His promise to send His Son to be your Saviour. Because of God's promise in Baptism, you can be sure that He is with you always. *Thank You God for making me Your child through holy baptism. Amen.*

Welcome to all worshipping with us today!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaalc@gmail.com.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

24 & 25 December Christmas	1 January 2023 Circumcision & Name of Jesus	8 January The Baptism of our Lord
Christmas Eve: 7.30pm OAK HC CHRISTMAS DAY 7.30am LOWOOD HC 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am TMBA HC	8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC 9.00am MARBURG LR	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA HC 9.00am GRN LR 10.15am AUB HC 9.00am LOWOOD LR
Christmas Services		
READINGS: Christmas Eve: Isaiah 7:10-14; 1 John 4:7-16; Matthew 1:18-25 Christmas Day: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 11:1-8; John 1:1-14		
HYMNS: Christmas Eve: 24 741 634 29 25 629 Christmas Day: 627 33 633 (26 23 part 1 [& 2 if needed]) 34		
1 January 2023		
READINGS: Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 2:21		
HYMNS: 552 36 277 (398 842) 512		

CAROLS EVENINGS:

Tonight, 7.00pm. Carols evening at Bethlehem Toowoomba. After the carols a cold/hot drink and biscuit will be available in the hall.

Sunday, 1 January, 1.30pm. Seminary Committee meeting at Bethlehem Toowoomba.

Please take home with you today a copy of Pastor's Christmas letter.