***“The Real Sign That It is Christmas” (Isaiah 7:14)***

***Christmas Eve, December 24, 2020***

As the song says, “*It’s Christmas time in the city.”* How can we tell? Well, the signs of Christmas are everywhere. You would have to be a present day slumbering Rip Van Winkle not to notice its Christmas time, and not just in the city, but in the whole country and, in fact, throughout most of the world. The calendar is actually irrelevant. You can see that it is Christmas in the decorations that have been *hung with care* and the brightly decorated trees that grace most businesses, public facilities and our homes. It’s also quite evident in the ringing of the cash register bells and the Salvation Army bells. And, yes, you can see that it is Christmastime in the excited and happy faces of the children so expectant of the gifts they will be receiving.

But do you realize that we do not need any of these signs to know and recognize Christmas? That’s because God has actually given us the only clear sign of Christmas. *Christmas,* after all means the *worship of Christ.* In fact, I dare say we would not be here tonight in worship if not for God’s sign. After all, decorating our homes, giving and receiving gifts, enjoying fancy meals and family gatherings are not unique to Christmastime.

So what is this sign of Christmas given to us by God? It is actually quite ancient. God gave it to our world two millennia ago and, in fact, even prophesied of this sign some seven centuries before it became visible. God announced this sign through the mouth of His prophet Isaiah. Isaiah states: “***Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”*** *(Is. 7:14).*

Whoever heard of such a sign as this? Who can even fathom it? I mean, com’ on! *A virgin conceives and bears a son*! Is not this a biological impossibility? Of course, it is! But even more fantastic and quite unbelievable is the fact that God said that the son born of the virgin shall be called “*Immanuel.” Immanuel* is a Hebrew word that translates *“God with us.”* That means this son of a virgin is God Himself! As the hymn proclaims, this is *“A great and mighty wonder, a full and holy cure; The Virgin bears the infant With virgin honor pure. The Word becomes incarnate And yet remains on high…” (LSB #383, vs 1 & 2).*

Talk about a sign! This sign captivates our imagination and challenges our mental acumen beyond all ability! That a virgin could be pregnant with a child is itself beyond the pale of our understanding. But that this cooing, nursing, diaper wearing, human baby is actually the Creator God Himself in human flesh, well, that just blows the mind!

But that’s just the whole point! In light of this sign, this fantastic sign, who cannot but *praise God… bow down and worship* this One who is the *Son of the virgin and God with us?* He is the same one God’s other prophets proclaimed in Hebrew as God’s *Messiah* and in Greek God’s *Christ;* both of which mean, God’s *Anointed One.* The same One sentto redeem and save our whole human race.

Not surprisingly, as we heard once again tonight from Luke’s Gospel, it is this *sign* that brought out all the angels of heaven to sing in the skies above Bethlehem, ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*** *(Luke 2:14).* This is the one and only sign for true *Christmas!*

Sadly, though, the one to whom this sign was first given, King Ahaz of Israel, was himself totally oblivious to it and its import for sinful mortals. For you see, in His rebuke of Ahaz’s idolatry and unbelief, God had graciously challenged Ahaz to ask of Him to perform any sign or wonder Ahaz cared to imagine.

Why? Because God wanted by that sign to demonstrate to Ahaz and the whole world His very existence as the only true God, as well as the sincerity of His love for all His people. The LORD had said to Ahaz, “***Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.***”

Unfortunately, Ahaz was reticent to ask God for any sign. In fact, Ahaz in his hard-heartedness tried to put on the airs that he was actually a most reverent person by not asking for a sign. He replied to the LORD, “*I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”*

Well, when God asks you to suggest a sign to test Him, the only faithful thing to do is ask for one, and not just something simple but a sign that is impossible to perform. After all, true faith in the LORD God, knows and trusts God to be in the impossibility business. He who created the whole universe out of nothing simply by His Word and who had led Israel out of bondage in Egypt, through the Red Sea, drowning this superpower’s whole army, certainly is up to any seemingly impossible challenge!

Because doubting Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, however, the LORD God gave to him and the whole world a sign anyway. And what a sign it is. It is the greatest and most miraculous sign of all: a sign that is actually two impossible signs in one; *the virgin birth of the Incarnate Son of God Himself.*

Some 800 years later, at just the right time, when God had brought all things into the right alignment, the LORD God brought forth His sign. As the Apostle Paul states in his letter to the Galatians, “***…When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons****” (4:4,5).*

Poor King Ahaz and all those who today are more enamored by man-made signs than God’s sign at Christmas or any other time! For God’s sign of the virgin birth of God’s own Son is more than just mind-boggling. It’s the very hope of the true celebrator of Christmas; that is, the true worshipper of Jesus Christ. For this One Born in Bethlehem and named Jesus, worshipped by the angels of heaven as well as the shepherds of Judea, is the impossible made possible by God in our very flesh. He is the sign above all signs. He is *God with us.* He is God’s love for us made manifest to us. He is as Christians have rightly confessed and worshipped for two thousand years, *“true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary. Who is our Lord, who has redeemed us, lost and condemned persons, purchased and won us from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that we may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity” (Luther’s Small Catechism).*

This Jesus born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem is why it is *Christmastime in the city* and why our Christmas is indeed Merry! Rejoice in God’s Sign as you worship Him again this Christmas! Amen!