

“Jesus Exercised His Authority”

Isaiah 7:10-17

This is a very special time in the lives of God’s people. That first Christmas was an event that forever changed the world in which we live. When God, the Creator of all things, entered into the world as a baby, born to the virgin Mary, God’s relationship to us and to the world completely transformed. However, the promises and message to His people remained the same.

Today, as we anticipate the celebration of our Savior and Redeemer entering the world in flesh and blood, we are not going to focus on the events surrounding Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. We are going to do that all next weekend. We are going to take a very Lutheran approach to the incarnation of the Son of God and ask: What does this mean?

More than 700 years before Christ entered the world as that child of Mary, God sends Isaiah to reassure King Ahaz that David’s throne will last forever. I promise you that, just as I promised your forefather David, says the Lord. God told Ahaz that he did not need to worry, but that he only

needed to trust in the Lord's promises. Through Isaiah, God even told Ahaz to, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign. Let it be as deep as Sheol or high as heaven."

As God often did to seal his promise, He was going to give Ahaz a sign that this was going to occur. It was Ahaz's choice as to what the sign was going to be. He could have asked for the sun to shine all night. He could have asked for anything. God told him that no sign was too much.

But Ahaz didn't want a sign from God. Ahaz didn't want to listen to Isaiah or have anything to do with what God had to say. In fact, Ahaz resented the fact that other kings got to do what they wanted, when they wanted, and didn't have to listen, let alone obey, anyone else. That's the whole point of being the king, right? Other kings got to pretend that they themselves were God.

That's the thing about having authority, if you are the person with the authority, the focus of the authority, the purpose of you having that authority is not about you. Authority is a burden more than a privilege – when it is used in the right way. Ultimately, as a best practice, having authority is seen as a privilege to carry that burden for the benefit of others – for the benefit of those who are under that authority.

King Ahaz resented the fact that there has really only been one king that has sat upon the throne of David, and that King is God Himself. Ahaz resented having Isaiah tell him what God wanted him to do. He resented the fact that God was his authority. From Adam on, our sinful human nature has wanted to be God.

Ahaz did not want God's help, because he had a plan. Rather than trusting in God's authority, Ahaz chose to buy protection from the king of Assyria. So he gave Tiglath-pileser III, one of the cruelest kings in all of human history, a large sum of money to use his army to protect the kingdom of Judah from its enemies. Ahaz foolishly thinks that the Assyrians will attack the enemies of Jerusalem to the north, conquer them, and then stop at the border and honor the agreement with Judah.

Man's sinful nature has never changed. As long as we have money in our pockets, our sinful self tells us that we have no need for God. And whenever we try to cut God out of our life, it always ends up badly.

However, God's good and gracious nature has never changed either. Even though King Ahaz did not want to have anything to do with God's plan to save His people from destruction, God still kept His promise to the faithful children of Abraham and saved His people, despite what Ahaz had done.

Ahaz did not want a sign from God, but God gave him one anyway. Nothing was going to stop God from giving a sign that He would redeem His people. And it was greater than any sign that Ahaz could have ever dreamed up. The sign that God gave to His people to show that they would be saved from their enemies was that “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.”

The sign that God gave to His faithful people assuring them that they would be saved from their enemies was not a sign that the generation of Isaiah or Ahaz, or their children, or their children’s children would ever see.

God sent His Son into the world as the child of Mary. The almighty Son of God became human. He exercised His authority. He chose to carry the burden of those under His authority – for the good of them all. He did this to save all of His children, not just the children of Abraham. And still most of the world wants to have nothing to do with Him. Still the world wants to be their own authority.

Christ came into the world to be much more than just a sign from God or example of holiness. He came to be the final Lamb of sacrifice to cover our sin. From the depths of Sheol to the highest heaven, you are under God’s authority. God is with us – and we call His name Immanuel. Amen.