

Notes for Next Sunday
Fourth Sunday in Advent

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 7:10-17). Upon receiving the prophet's message king Ahaz had nothing to say. He remained silent. And this silence did not indicate consensus but unbelief. He rejected this word from God and hardened his heart against divine grace. He had already placed his trust in another helper. He had already begun negotiations with the king Assyria. And Assyria, the world power, was mightier than Syria and Ephraim. However, the Lord did not allow Himself to be put down so easily. He continued to talk to Ahaz. Since Ahaz refuses to ask a sign of God, He Himself will provide one of His own will. The ultimate sign is that of the coming Savior, Immanuel, "God with us."

Epistle (Romans 1:1-7). Paul affirms three callings from God: he is called to be an apostle, the Romans are called to belong to Christ, and they are called to be saints. We sinners are prone to think that we control every aspect of our lives, and we tend to live only for ourselves. Knowing the futility of this, Christ Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross that we might be redeemed. He calls us out of sin and death and into life. Praise God! We are called to belong to Him and to love and serve others.

Gospel (Matthew 1:18-25). Matthew's genealogy (1:2-17) has begun to answer the question "Whence Jesus Christ?" Its answer is that Jesus comes as the fulfillment of a history, the goal of God's dealings with the sons of Abraham, the nation of Israel. Jesus the Christ issues forth from God's faithfulness to a faithless people as that divine mercy has marched the course of the generations toward the coming of the Anointed One.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 7:10-17

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." ¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. ¹⁶ But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. ¹⁷ The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria."

7:11 a sign. Ahaz is to name a sign so that God might tangibly confirm what He has spoken and move Ahaz to believe. The Lord occasionally grants such help to weak consciences. (TLSB)

7:12 I will not put the Lord to the test. Ahaz responds in false piety, trying to avoid a blatant statement of disbelief, but God is not fooled. (TLSB)

7:14 sign.... virgin ... son ... Immanuel.† A figurative way of predicting that within nine months it will be so evident that God is with his people that she will name her son Immanuel, which means "God is with us." By the time he reaches the age of discretion ("knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right," v. 16) the enemy will have given up the design of conquest and will have been laid waste by the Assyrian empire (vv. 16-17). The Hebrew word *'almah* occurs six times in the OT and in each case refers to a young woman of marriageable age who is still in the state of virginity (Ge 24:43; Ex 2:8; Ps 68:25; Pr

30:19; SS 1:3; 6:8). Mt 1:23 understood the woman mentioned here to be a type (a foreshadowing) of the Virgin Mary. (CSB)

7:14 call him Immanuel. This describes what kind of person it will be. This is not a proper name. He is indeed the Son of a virgin, and yet He is “God with us,” therefore God and man. (Luther)

7:15 curds and honey. The land would recover slowly from the ravages of soldiers quartered among them. Instead of living on the products of agriculture such as grain and meat, the survivors of the invasion would sustain themselves with food derived from a pastoral way of life: cheese from flocks and honey gathered from trees in the woods (vv 21–25). Still, this is the beginning of the restoration of normal life. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures³ regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.⁵ Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.⁶ And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:1 servant. Or slave. Paul belongs to Christ and lives to serve Him. (TLSB)

1:1 apostle. One called directly by Christ to proclaim the Gospel everywhere. (TLSB)

1:1 prophets. Not just the writers of the prophetic books, for the whole OT prophesied about Jesus. (CSB)

1:5 to the obedience that comes from faith. Lit, “by the listening of faith,” i.e., to trustingly hear and follow what someone says. (TLSB)

1:6 are called to belong to Jesus Christ. God calls Christians to faith and incorporates us into His body. We passively receive His grace. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ **This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.** ¹⁹ **Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.** ²⁰ **But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.** ²¹ **She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”** ²² **All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:** ²³ **“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”** ²⁴ **When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.** ²⁵ **But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.**

1:18 Jesus Christ. Christ means Anointed One. This points to the incarnation of “the Christ.”

1:18 pledged to be married. There were no sexual relations during a Jewish betrothal period, but it was a much more binding relationship than a modern engagement and could be broken only by divorce. In Dt 22:24 a betrothed woman is called a “wife,” though the preceding verse speaks of her as being “pledged to be married.” Matthew uses the terms “husband” (v. 19) and “wife” (v. 24) of Joseph and Mary before they were married. (CSB)

1:18 through the Holy Spirit. From the ensuing verses it is clear that Joseph was not aware of this cause of her pregnancy. Matthew’s readers/hearers, however, learn it from the beginning of this passage, and so it is set off in the translation with parentheses. (CC)

1:19 divorce her quietly. He would sign the necessary legal papers but not have her judged publicly and stoned (see Dt 22:23–24). (CSB)

1:20 in a dream. The phrase occurs five times in the first two chapters of Matthew and indicates the means the Lord used for speaking to Joseph. (CSB)

1:20 take Mary home as your wife. They were legally bound to each other, but not yet living together as husband and wife. (CSB)

1:21 Jesus...save his people. It means (“he *himself* will save”). (CC)