**Notes for Next Sunday**

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

**The Point of this Week’s Readings**

Old Testament (Isaiah 7:10-17). In verses 1-9 we find that Ahaz, King of Judah, was being threatened by a coalition which included Assyria. God through Isiah tells Ahaz to ask for a sign for help in this situation. But because of his unbelief Ahaz does not do so. Now in beginning with verse 10 God once again tells Ahaz to ask for a sign from God for help. But, again Ahaz refuses and even pretends to be religious by saying he will not tempt God. In spite of the unbelief of Ahaz, God in verse 14 gives a sign that a virgin will give birth to a child who will be called Immanuel. Immanuel will be the name of the child during whose life Judah will not be captured. Immanuel also points forward to Jesus.

Epistle (Romans 1:1-7). These verses include a formal greeting. Paul identifies himself, his divinely given authority, and his message. He addresses the recipients, describing them as God sees them. Paul also speaks of Jesus who in His human form was a descendent of King David. Then Paul speaks of the victorious Christ who called Paul to share God’s grace with the Gentiles. Finally, he blesses them with grace and peace. Paul is careful to focus on the triune God and His grace, setting the Epistle’s tone.

Gospel (Matthew 1:18-25). Matthew’s genealogy (1:2–17) has begun to answer the question “Who is Jesus Christ? Matthew continues to answer the question of Jesus’ origin in 1:18–25. These verses contain three primary theological movements. First, the text’s structure contrasts the ways that human beings think and behave with the unexpected way in which God puts his plan to save into action. That same contrast is evident in the difference between Joseph’s initial intent to divorce Mary versus his believing response once God’s plan is made known to him. Second, the unit highlights the naming of the child: he is “Immanuel” (1:23), but receiving even more emphasis is “Jesus” (1:21, 25), the proper name that God himself (through his angel) assigns to the child miraculously conceived in the Virgin Mary. Third, by means of the first explicit OT citation (Is 7:14 in Mt 1:23), Matthew invites his readers/hearers to reflect on the relationship between God’s ways of judgment and salvation in Israel’s history and those ways that have now come to fulfillment in Jesus the Christ, Immanuel, “God is with us” (1:23). (CC)

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

OLD TESTAMENT – Isiah 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.* God was willing to strengthen the faith of Ahaz through a sign. (CSB)

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 (Jdg 6:17-21). (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.” The name “God is with us” was meant to convince Ahaz that God could rescue him from his enemies. Jesus was the final fulfillment of this prophecy, for he was “God with us” in the fullest sense (Mt 1:23; cf. Isa 9:6–7). (CSB)

*7:15 when he knows … wrong … right.* No exact age is given, only a mark of maturation within childhood. Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom) and Syria (Aram) will be destroyed by the Assyrians before a child could mature. (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 Scriptures ﻿3﻿ 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)

*1:7 loved by God and called.* The initiative is God’s; He loved, called, and saved us. (TLSB)

*1:7 saints.*† The basic idea of the Greek for this word is “holiness.” All Christians are saints in that they have been declared holy (righteous) by God and are being made increasingly “holy” by the Holy Spirit (see note on 1Co 1:2). (CSB)

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 through the Holy Spirit.* To a Jewish audience this was important because no sexual relations are permitted during a Jewish betrothal, although the engagement could only be broken by divorce.

*1:19 divorce her quietly.* By Jewish law he had the right to bring his fiancée before a court of law to prove her infidelity; this could result in her being stoned. Or he could break the marriage contract by divorcing her quietly. (LL)

*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.*John Chrysostom: “[Matthew] darkly signified the Gentiles too. For ‘His people’ are not the Jews only, but also all that draw nigh and receive the knowledge that is from Him” [NPNF1 10:26]. (TLSB)

*1:22 fulfill.* Twelve times Matthew speaks of the OT being fulfilled, i.e., of events in NT times that were prophesied in the OT—a powerful testimony to the divine origin of Scripture and its accuracy even in small details. In the fulfillments we also see the writer’s concern for linking the gospel with the OT. (CSB)

*1:24 did what the angel commanded.* In contrast to King Ahaz, who doubted Isaiah’s prophecy, Joseph showed that he believed the word of the Lord. (TLSB)