

## Fourth Sunday in Advent

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 7:10-17

<sup>10</sup> Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, <sup>11</sup> “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.” <sup>12</sup> But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.” <sup>13</sup> 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? <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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.”

**7:10** AGAIN THE LORD SPOKE TO AHAZ – Upon receiving the prophet’s message king Ahaz had nothing to say. He remained silent. And this silence did not indicate consensus but dissensus, 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. (Stoeckhardt)

We can see the significance of this silence by contrasting it with Hezekiah, who years later faced the much more serious threat of the invading armies of Assyria. Hezekiah went into the temple and sent his advisors to Isaiah. Then when Hezekiah received a written threat from Sennacherib, he took the Assyrian’s letter into the temple, spread it before the Lord, and prayed (2 Kings 19). God then sent Isaiah to Hezekiah with the promise of deliverance. (PBC)

**7:11** *a sign.* God was willing to strengthen the faith of Ahaz through a sign (see Ex 3:12). (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)

Here God is acting in a very one-sided manner to gain the trust of Ahaz. Even though Ahaz has anything but worthy of God’s love, God continues to reach out to him. The use of both of the words “Lord” and “God” send a very powerful message because the Israelites knew “Lord” to be covenant keeper (God had kept all of his promises and will always be faithful) and “God” to be the God of creation who is all powerful (nothing is out of his range of ability). (Luther)

Behold the great and overflowing goodness of God and His sublime patience. For even though disdained in His promise and threat, He still does not stop inciting to faith, as if

to say: If you do not want to believe promises and threats, at least believe the signs and choose whatever you wish. Ahaz, in turn, rejects also the sign with the worst blasphemy and ingratitude. God offers a sign; this man cites Scripture. (Luther)

LORD YOUR GOD – Though Ahaz doubted, the Lord is still God. Doubts do not remove His deity! (TLSB)

DEEPEST DEPTHS ... HIGHEST HEIGHTS – This invitation includes the other, to turn his heart away from all that is not of God and is unable to help, and to give himself to the living God, who has heaven, earth, and hell in His power. (Stoeckhardt)

No limits were put on Ahaz's request; God would do anything. (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)

Always the ungodly become more hardened. Now, those are wrong who say that signs avail nothing for faith. God is almost always accustomed to add a sign to the Word, just as here, too, he would have added one, provided that the king would have accepted it. Paul also approves the use of signs in 2 Cor. 12:12. (Luther)

The most frightening thing about his attitude, however, was the hypocrisy in pretending he did not want to put God to the test. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." This, of course, stands written in the Law: Deut 6:16. Ahaz would have put God to the test had he on his own asked God for a sign, had he, without any word from God, asked for God to demonstrate His miraculous power. But to venture upon something at God's command and promise, to trust in, rely upon God's Word, this is not tempting God but is having trust in God, this is true faith. (Stoeckhardt)

**7:13** *house of David*. See note on v. 2. (CSB)

Ahaz was in the Davidic line. The following words apply to the whole nation. (TLSB)

Ahaz pretends religion, as if from fear of God he did not wish to ask for a sign. Such is the nature of hypocrites, who display religiosity where it is not proper; on the other hand, where they should fear, they are most proud and stubborn, as Ps. 36:1 and Ps. 53:5 say. Both are extremely offensive to God and deceptive to the people. (Luther)

To put God to the test is indeed evil when it is done without a word of God. He who is commanded to put God to the test and does not do so is sinning. God is not being tempted when He Himself orders it. It is not tempting God to believe in Christ, to love the neighbor, because God has commanded these things. However, he who desires to serve God short of His commandment is tempting Him, since he does not know whether it will please Him. Thus Ahaz multiplied the religions of the heathen in Judah, he tempted God and yet did not think he was tempting Him. He thought so, however, when

he was ordered to do so. There are many such people, above all the false prophets. (Luther)

**WILL YOU TRY THE PATIENCE OF MY GOD** – To weary men is certainly evil. But if anyone has sinned against God, who will pray for him? The prophet, however, declares the people guilty of both. He who sins against his neighbor sins against God; but this is the great and unforgivable sin, when someone resists God's Word and work. Other sins are easily recognized and have a form, but this one, with which one dashes against God, is not recognized and is therefore unforgivable, and this is because men are offensive to God. (Luther)

Isaiah has turned the reference to God from “your” God (v 11) to “my” God. Ahaz is faithless, but Isaiah believes. (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. *Immanuel.*† The name “God is with us” was meant to convince Ahaz that God could rescue him from his enemies. See Nu 14:9; 2Ch 13:12; Ps 46:7. “Immanuel” is used again in 8:8, 10, and it may be another name for Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:3). If so, the boy's names had complementary significance (see note on 8:3). 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). See Hos 11:1; Mt 2:15 for another example of God's direction of Israel's history in such a way as to let the event foreshadow what he would do in the life of his incarnate Son. (CSB)

Luther: “He foretells two signs: The one is hidden, the other open. The latter he explains in chapter 8[:3] in a way not much different from Hosea, chapter 1. But Isaiah includes both signs. The first one does not apply to Ahaz, because he did not live to see it, but the second does. But since he now resists the Word of God and refuses a sign, how can his faith be strengthened? Therefore the prophet speaks of a sign to come, against which they will dash, just as the sign of Jonah was given to the Jews (cf. Matt. 12:39), and those who refuse to believe will perish. Nevertheless, it is a sign of lifting up and building up and strengthening for those who believe (Matt. 12:39; 16:4). And this is the summary of this chapter until the end, because he says that this prediction is already in the process of fulfillment in these unbelievers” (AE 16:84). (TLSB)

**THE LORD HIMSELF WILL GIVE YOU A SIGN** – That is to say, “Since you refuse to ask a sign of God, He Himself will provide one of His own will.” These things are said by a wrathful prophet. And he foretells two signs: The one is hidden, the other open. The latter he explains in chapter 8 in a way not much different from Hosea, chapter 1. But Isaiah includes both signs. The first one does not apply to Ahaz, because he did not

live to see it, but the second does. But since he now resists the Word of God and refuses a sign, how can his faith be strengthened? Therefore the prophet speaks of a sign to come, against which they will dash, just as the sign of Jonah was given to the Jews (cf. Matt. 12:39), and those who refuse to believe will perish. Nevertheless, it is a sign of lifting up and building up and strengthening for those who believe (Matt. 12:39; 16:4). (Luther)

THE VIRGIN – And this is the summary of this chapter until the end, because he says that this prediction is already in the process of fulfillment in these unbelievers.

הַעַלְמָה, a young woman capable of giving birth, for an old woman can be a virgin too, but she is not called הַעַלְמָה. (Luther)

Hbr *‘almah* can clearly mean “virgin maiden” and is closely related to the Hbr *bethulah*, which also normally means “virgin.” The LXX properly translated it with the Gk *parthenos*, “virgin.” As Luther notes, there are two signs. On the one hand, the Lord was promising Ahaz that in short order—during the nine months and weaning process of a typical childbirth—He would deliver Judah from the two kings (v 16) threatening them. In fact, their subjects would be fully swept away by exile. On the other hand, the Lord promised something remarkably different from a typical pregnancy, a miracle that would have shocked Ahaz’s unbelieving heart: a virgin would conceive (v 14)! The Lord has eternal salvation in view, not simply Judah’s temporal deliverance. The NT reveals the meaning of the Immanuel sign. The Son of God would be born of the Virgin Mary by the work of the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus: “Jesus Christ, who was announced by the prophets, who from the fruit of David’s body was Emmanuel, [is] ‘the messenger of great counsel of the Father’ ... He whom God promised David that He would raise up from the fruit of his belly ... an eternal King, is the same who was born of the Virgin, herself of the lineage of David” (*ANF* 1:441, 453). Athanasius: “But what does [this passage] mean, if not that God has come in the Flesh?” (*NPNF* 2 4:577). (TLSB)

BE WITH CHILD ...WILL GIVE BIRTH – In Hebrew it is “has conceived,” and that is the indication of a miracle; it is as if the prophet were already seeing it. Again, since he says that it is God’s sign, it is necessary that that conception and birth be in a different manner than is commonly and naturally the ease, for it would not be a sign if one Who today is a virgin would become pregnant after a half year. Therefore she has to be both a virgin and with child. Matthew 1:21 f. clearly explains this. (Luther)

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)

Lit, “God with us.” This name reflects both salvation and judgment. On the one hand, God with us (8:10) promises protection against foreign attack. On the other hand, Assyria “will sweep on into Judah” like a flood (8:8). Thus “Immanuel” functions as Law or Gospel, depending on the king’s response. In ch 7, the house of David (e.g., Ahaz) did not accept the Lord’s offer of a sign; but later this house of David—embodied in the Davidic descendant Joseph of Nazareth—accepts the sign about the Child. In Mt 18:20 and 28:20, the promise of Immanuel will be repeated. Born of a virgin, the incarnate Son of God is truly Immanuel, “God with us.” (TLSB)

**7:15** *curds and honey*. Curds (a kind of yogurt) and honey meant a return to the simple diet of those who lived off the land. The Assyrian invasion would devastate the countryside and make farming impossible. (See vv. 22–25 for the significance of the expression.) (CSB)

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)

This is a description of His childhood and humanity. As He is said to be born as a true human being, so He will be reared in a true human fashion. (Luther)

*when he knows ... wrong ... right*. Suggests the age of moral determination and responsibility under the law—most likely 12 or 13 years of age. Thus, “when” this boy is 12 or 13 (722/721 B.C.), he will be eating curds and honey instead of agricultural products—due to the devastation of Israel by Assyria. Some believe that this expression involves a shorter period of time, identical to that in v. 16 and 8:4. (CSB)

Thus He will grow up like other boys until He arrives at the judgment of reason. (Luther)

**7:16** *before the boy knows ... land ... laid waste*. See note on v. 4; cf. 8:4. “Before” the boy is 12 or 13 years old, Aram and Israel will be plundered. This happened in 732 B.C., when the boy was about two years old. (CSB)

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)

**REJECT THE WRONG...RIGHT** – This wording emphasizes development of the will. As children mature, they are governed less and less by raw instinct. The prophet does not mean that infants and small children are sinless or not accountable for their sins, as some interpreters wrongly assume. Sin corrupts all stages of human development, and a person is always accountable before God. (TLSB)

That is to say, you, ungodly man, do not believe anything. But they will be there because of this unbelief, so that those enemies of yours will perish, but nonetheless you too will follow not long afterwards. But this will happen before the Boy has learned to name butter and honey. This is said for the purpose of making the prophecy dark and as an obstacle for the Jews, who to this day do not understand this passage and say that Immanuel is Hezekiah. But this sign was given for the sake of the remnant, that the kingdom of Judah should not be destroyed until Christ would come. It is, however, a hidden sign for the sake of the ungodly. (Luther)

WILL BE LAID WASTE – Assyrians will decimate these countries.

The land of the two kings, who now terrify and threaten Jerusalem, therefore, Syria and Ephraim, will be abandoned and left devastated. The fulfillment of this prediction began when the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser invaded Syria and Israel. He made Syria an Assyrian province and led into captivity a considerable portion of the inhabitants of Syria and Israel, namely, the inhabitants of north and east Galilee, on the other side of the Euphrates. This occurred perhaps one to two years after this encounter between Ahaz and Isaiah. (Stoeckhardt)

**7:17** The coming war with Assyria would be the worst since Israel split into two kingdoms. (TLSB)

THE LORD WILL BRING ON YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE – He says: Because the unbeliever rejects the present sign, he is unworthy also of the future sign. The Assyrians and Egyptians did not wage war against Judah at the same time, but each in turn. And this for the reason that they, having fallen away from God, trusted in men, as will be shown later. (Luther)

A TIME – Some take this as applying to the removal to Babylon. But the prophecy must be understood in accordance with the matter at hand, for when these things were said here, the Babylonian kingdom did not yet exist. Therefore the prophet attributes to the Assyrians what their successors, the Chaldeans, did, and what belongs to a part is said of the whole. The prophet calls all human dregs Assyrians, namely, Medes, Parthians, Chaldeans, etc., and says in short: You will not live in peace until that sign of offense will come. (Luther)

*Ephraim broke away from Judah.* Almost two centuries earlier (see 1Ki 12:19–20). (CSB)

*king of Assyria.* Ahaz's appeal to Assyria would bring temporary relief (2Ki 16:8–9), but eventually Assyria would attack Judah (see 8:7–8; 36:1). (CSB)

This statement is directly connected to the preceding without a conjunction. So what we are reading here is the second part of the final clause for which v. 16a serves as protasis. The construction is as follows: Before the boy will reject the evil and choose good, the land of the two hostile kings will be abandoned, but the Lord will also cause the king of Assyria to fall upon the land of Judah. Therefore. Also what is written in v. 17 and what follows precedes Emmanuel's childhood. What v. 17 threatens king Ahaz and his house and people is this: black days will come upon the king of Judah, upon the house of David, upon the kingdom and people of Judah, the likes of which have not since that unfortunate even, the apostasy of Ephraim, been experienced by the ten tribes of Israel. The king of Assyria, to whom Ahaz had appealed for help against Syria and Israel, who made an end to these two hostile kingdoms, will then also fall upon Judah. The king of Assyria appears here, as often, as representative of the heathen world empire. (Stoeckhardt)

As Isaiah outlines later in the chapter, Ahaz would get more than he bargained for from Assyria. For his failure to trust in the Lord, Ahaz was judged. He never heard the sweet promise of the Messiah that Isaiah spoke. Those promises sailed over his head without leaving a wake. What was left was “a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah.” That time of poverty and foreign domination would continue through the time of the coming of the virgin’s child, Immanuel. (PBC)

#### EPISTLE – Romans 1:1-7

**Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—<sup>2</sup> the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures<sup>3</sup> regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> 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.**

**Ch 1** Luther: “It is right for a preacher of the gospel in the first place by revelation of the law and of sin to rebuke and to constitute as sin everything that is not the living fruit of the Spirit and of faith in Christ, in order that men should be led to know themselves and their own wretchedness, and to become humble and ask for help. This is therefore what St. Paul does. He begins in chapter 1 to rebuke the gross sins and unbelief that are plainly evident. These were, and still are, the sins of the heathen who live without God’s grace. He says: Through the gospel there shall be revealed the wrath of God from heaven against all men because of their godless lives and their unrighteousness. For even though they know and daily recognize that there is a God, nevertheless nature itself, without grace, is so bad that it neither thanks nor honors God. Instead it blinds itself, and goes steadily from bad to worse until, after idolatry, it blatantly commits the most shameful sins, along with all the vices, and also allows others to commit them unrebuked” (AE 35:372). (TLSB)

**1:1–7** Formal greeting. Paul identifies himself, his divinely given authority, and his message. He addresses the recipients, describing them as God sees them. Finally, he blesses them with grace and peace. Gk letters typically employed this general structure, but Paul is careful to focus on the triune God and His grace, setting the Epistle’s tone. (TLSB)

**1:1** *Paul.*† In ancient times writers put their names at the beginning of letters for the convenience of the addressee(s), since letters were written on scrolls. For more information on Paul see notes on Ac 9:1; Php 3:4–14. (CSB)

The standard form used for beginning a letter differed somewhat from what we’re accustomed to. We place the author’s signature at the end of the letter; the ancients put it up front. The letter to the Romans opens with the first word of the first verse identifying Paul as the author. A second item always stated up front in ancient letter was an indication of whom the letter was intended for. That comes in verse 7 of Paul’s

letter, where the recipients are identified as “all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.” The third standard item in every ancient letter was a greeting. Here in Romans the greeting, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ,” is very similar to the phrase that opens virtually all of Paul’s NT letters. (PBC)

He was born in an observant Jewish home and given a Hebrew name at birth. There are several explanations as to how Saul went to being Paul. One is that Paul had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. His Jewish name was Saul and his Greek name was Paul. A second is that God would change people’s name after he had an encounter with them. Several examples are:

- Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many) – Genesis 17:5
- Sarai (princess) to Sarah (princess of many nations – serve the Lord’s purpose) – Genesis 17:15
- Jacob (deceiver) to Israel (struggled with God and with men and have overcome) – Genesis 32:28

They may have also followed the custom common among Diaspora Jews of adopting a Greek or Latin name which had a sound similar to that of the Hebrew name given at birth. The name “Paul” means little which also well describes his physical stature. Paul was a “in your face kind of guy.” You could say he was obsessive compulsive and today might be a candidate for prozac. This shows itself in some of his writings where repeats certain points he wants to make. (Ephesians 2:8-9 is but one example.)

Switching to name that means “little” reminds me of the words of John the Baptist in John 3:30, “He must become greater; I must become less.” In order for Christ to shine through we must also decrease.

*servant.* The Greek for this word means (1) a “slave,” who completely belongs to his owner and has no freedom to leave, and (2) a “servant,” who willingly chooses to serve his master. See notes on Ex 14:31; Ps 18 title; Isa 41:8–9; 42:1. (CSB)

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

OT (ebed – Job 7:2) NT (doulos) – In earthly terms a slave didn’t even earn wages. He was the property of his master and was completely bound to his master’s will. Since the slave received no wages, all he had to look forward to after a hard day’s work was rest under the shade tree or in a shelter. For Judaism in the time of Jesus, as for the Greek world, the slave was on a lower level of humanity. By law the slave was classified with immobile goods, had no rights at law and could not own property. Even his family did not belong to him; it was the property of his master, who might be given him a favorite slave in marriage. They had no genealogies, and therefore there was no possibility of controlling their origin. Since a slave was a chattel, his master could do with him as he desired (even mutilation); there was none to hinder the master. (Kittel – Volume 2, pages 275,6)

With this word Paul confesses that he belongs to and is totally at the disposal of his Lord. It is an expression of humility, a title that Paul shares with all believers (Rom 6:22; 14:4, 8). But there is in this title also a high claim. Great and singularly favored men of God were in the OT called servants of God: Moses (Joshua 1:2), Joshua (Joshua 24:29), David (Ps.78:70), and especially the prophets (Amos 3:7; Jer 7:25; Dan 9:6). And Jesus had applied this high title to the disciples and apostles whom He had called and sent (Matt 10:24-25; John 13:16). With the self-designation “servant,” Paul is joining the ranks of those to whom the Word of the Lord came, men who were chosen to be the proclaimers of the Word and will of God. There is no personal pride in this for Paul; he is confessing what God by His call has made of him. The call of God that had summoned Abraham and Israel and the prophets to their place and their task in a history controlled by God (Gen 12:1-3; Ex 3:10; Is 6:8-9; Jer 1:4-5) had come to Paul and given him his work to do. (Franzmann)

The Greek finds his personal dignity in the fact that he is free. In the *doulos* the free world always sees its own antitype, and sees the perversion of its own nature. Hence the Greek can only reject and scorn the type of service which in inner outer structure bears the slightest resemblance to that of the slave. (Kittel – Volume 2, pages 261, 2)

The status of the Christian, on the other hand, is characterized by the fact that by the death of Jesus he is rescued from the “slavery” of powers which aimed to subjugate him and to separate him from God. (Kittel – Volume 2, page 275)

Jesus models and teaches this clearly on the night of the Last Supper. In this episode Jesus makes it quite clear to His disciples that His office as He sees it consists in His being as a slave rather than in striving for power and glory. We do not properly understand the scene, or the intention of Jesus, if we do not realize that washing feet was one of the duties of slaves, and indeed of non-Jewish rather than Jewish slaves. In performing this service, Jesus puts Himself in the position of a slave who must unthinkingly fulfill his office. (Kittel – Volume 2, page 277)

CALLED – Paul did not appoint himself; God called him (Ac 9:15–16). (TLSB)

Paul did not choose to become a Christian. Rather God called him. When Ananias, the pious Christian whom the Lord sent to minister to Paul in his blindness, objected to going near this flagrant persecutor, God told him, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). (PBC)

OF JESUS CHRIST – Because of such a great Lord he is to be received with the same reverence as if he were Christ Himself, Christ who says (Luke 10:16): “He who hears you.” (Luther)

*apostle*. One specially commissioned by Christ (see notes on Mk 6:30; 1Co 1:1; Heb 3:1). (CSB)

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

Not an intruder or interloper, driven by ambition, like a false apostle, who “does not enter ... by the door but climbs in by another way.” These false apostles come by their own temerity, therefore they are thieves and not shepherds, as John 10 tells us. Heb. 5:4: “One does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, as Aaron was.” (Luther)

Though he did not, as the Twelve, travel about with the Lord during His lifetime, he yet lacked none of the other prerogatives of the apostleship, the eye witness and the ear witness. Paul had seen the resurrected Lord with his eyes and had received direct instruction from Him concerning the things he should teach. (1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3) (Stoeckhardt)

SET APART – Paul as a Pharisee (separated) was set apart from the broad mass of his people for a scrupulous devotion to the fulfillment of the Law. God had reversed this Pharisee’s course and had set him apart for the proclamation of the Gospel. (Franzmann)

Consecrated, chosen to proclaim the Gospel. (TLSB)

“Taken away from preoccupation with other things, I have been dedicated to, initiated in, and sanctified for, this one office, that I teach the Gospel, just as a priest is set apart and separated to offer the sacrifice.” (Luther)

Each Christian is set aside for witnessing to the gospel. Individual Christians can and do go where pastors are unable to go. Each needs to see how God is using them (family – neighborhood – work). None of us live where we do or go where we go by accident. – Christus Magister (A Teacher come from God.” John 3:2).

*gospel*. See note on Mk 1:1. (From the Old English *godspel*, “good story” or “good news,” which accurately translates the Greek. The good news is that God has provided salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (CSB)

The Good News of salvation through faith in Christ. Paul’s call is to proclaim Christ’s grace. (TLSB)

The good news which Mark and the other Gospel writers report centers in Jesus of Nazareth. Mark calls him Jesus Christ the Son of God. (PBC)

Among the Romans it meant “joyful tidings” and was associated with the cult of the emperor, whose birthday, attainment to majority and ascension to power were celebrated as festival occasions for the whole world. The reports of such festivals were called “evangels” in the inscription and papyri of the Imperial Age. A Calendar inscription from 9 BC found in Priene in Asia Minor, says of the emperor Octavian (Augustus): “the birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of joyful tidings



Luke 21:33 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

The Gospel is news of God’s new creation in the world’s last day. But new as it is, it has behind it a long history. It is the culmination of God’s revelation; it is the fulfillment of His promises. Paul shares with all the men of the NT the believing conviction, implanted by Jesus Himself, that the OT is the foreword to the New, that the life and death and resurrection of Jesus all took place as the fulfillment of the ancient promises of God, that “all the promises of God find their Yes in Him” (2Cor 1:20). (Franzmann)

*prophets.* Not just the writers of the prophetic books, for the whole OT prophesied about Jesus (see Lk 24:27, 44). (CSB)

*Holy Scriptures.* The OT. (CSB)

This is wonderful proof of the grace of God, that above and beyond the eternal promises He gives the promise also in human words, not only in spoken words but also in written ones. (Luther)

1 Timothy 2:4 “who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

**1:3** REGARDING HIS SON – This is the Gospel, which deals not merely with the Son of God in general but with Him who has become incarnate and is of the seed of David. In effect he says: “He has emptied Himself and has become weak. He who was before all and created everything now has a beginning Himself and has been made.”

John 1:1-3, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

WAS A DESCENDANT OF DAVID – The Messiah came, as prophesied (cf Dt 18:15), from David’s line (cf 2Sm 7:12–13). (TLSB)

John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John 1:14 “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, <sup>d</sup> who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

When the NT church says this of Jesus Christ (Paul is probably quoting an early creed-like summary of the Gospel), the church is saying: “He came from the realm of God to us of His own free will; He took upon Himself the flesh of man for us men and for our salvation.” (Franzmann)

**1:4 THROUGH THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS** – An expression found in early Christian Aram for the Holy Spirit, given by the resurrected Christ. It shows Jesus’ power and testifies to Christ’s identity. (TLSB)

**WAS DECLARED** – Lit, “made Son of God” in the sense of an appointment to an office. (TLSB)

**BY HIS RESURRECTION** – Jesus’ bodily resurrection affirms His deity and the completion of His saving work. (TLSB)

**OUR LORD** – Confession of faith: they believe in Jesus. These verses have the character of an early Christian creed. (TLSB)

**1:5 GRACE AND APOSTLESHIP** – Christ saved Paul (by grace) and called him into service (apostleship). (TLSB)

**TO THE OBEDIENCE THAT COMES FROM FAITH** – Lit, “by the listening of faith,” i.e., to trustingly hear and follow what someone says. Not sanctification (obedience that results from faith) but justification (obedience that consists of faith). Faith hears and believes the message, then responds appropriately (cf 10:17; 15:18; Heb 11:1). (TLSB)

Paul knows of no obedience, in the religious sense, which is not of faith. (Franzmann)

**ALL THE GENTILES** – Salvation is not for the Jews alone, but for all (cf Mt 28:18–20). God called Paul esp to reach the Gentiles. (TLSB)

### **Called Saints in Rome (1:6–7)**

The impact of the εὐαγγέλιον in Paul’s life was expressed in 1:5. Then in 1:6 it reaches out to other specific people, those to whom Paul writes this letter. The emphatic ἐστε καὶ ὑμεῖς, “you, you also, are,” reinforces their inclusion within the call of Christ. The believers in Rome are also “called of/by Jesus Christ.” On the one hand, those in Rome do not have the same apostolic calling as Paul. Yet the essential point is that they too have been given faith and called to be “among” those “whom” (ἐν οἷς, 1:6) Jesus calls his own redeemed people. (CC)

**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)

**1:7 LOVED BY GOD AND CALLED** – The initiative is God’s; He loved, called, and saved us. (TLSB)

*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)

Always plural in Paul's Letters. Those declared holy because of Christ's saving work, i.e., the community of believers God calls and sets apart by faith. (TLSB)

χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη—Instead of the typical Greek salutation χαιρεῖν, “greetings,” Paul employs χάρις, “grace.” “Jewish letters often began with variations of the traditional Jewish greeting: ‘Peace to you’ (*shalom*). Paul combined the two greetings, producing what becomes his characteristic opening.” (CC)

*Grace*. See notes on Jn 4:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2. (CSB)

*peace*. See notes on Jn 14:27; 20:19; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2. – Peace is the state of whole and sound well-being, the divine health, which God's grace creates, bestows, and perpetually renews. (Franzmann)

GRACE AND PEACE – The grace of God which saves us will always lead to peace. You can't have true peace without grace. There is a bumper sticker which says it well, “No Jesus, No Peace,” “Know Jesus, Know Peace.” – Grace was the common greeting in the Greek-speaking world. Peace (*Shalom*) was, and is, the standard greeting in the Jewish world. Since this letter was written to an ethnically mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles, both of these greetings are appropriate. Coming from Paul's pen, however, these two terms are far more than just a commonplace secular greeting. In Paul's Christian vocabulary, grace is the quality that makes God willing, even eager, to give good gifts to believers. And God's gifts – such as forgiveness of sins, a good conscience, and the certainty of heaven – bring peace to those who are the objects of God's grace. Thus grace and peace go together as cause and effect. (PBC)

**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.  
• Lord Jesus, thank You for making me Your own and for all of Your gifts. Amen. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 1:18-25

**<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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.” <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.” <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.**

CODE – ET = English Translation  
LXX = Septuagint  
MT = Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible

**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. (CC)

Matthew continues to answer the question of Jesus' origin in 1:18–25. This is quite clear from the opening words of the unit: “Now *Jesus Christ's* origin was of this sort” (1:18). The paragraph contains 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)

The text's structure consists of the introductory clause of 1:18a followed by three sections: 1:18b–19; 1:20–23; and 1:24–25. These sections narrate in turn (1) weak human intentions and fallible human wisdom regarding the origin of Jesus (1:18b–19); (2) God's truth and purpose regarding Jesus' origin (1:20–23); and (3) Joseph's trusting human response to God's revealed plan in this Jesus (1:24–25). (CC)

**1:18 JESUS CHRIST** – Christ means Anointed One. This points to the incarnation of “the Christ.”

*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 (see v. 19). 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)

**TO BE WITH CHILD** – εὐρέθη ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα—The feminine participle ἔχουσα, with Mary as referent, expresses indirect discourse, that is, the content of what Joseph found, literally, “it was found that she was possessing [a child] in the womb.” If expressed in active voice, it would read, (CC)

Mt 1:18b–19 shows Joseph’s perception of the situation and his pious, yet uninformed, decision. Mary “was found” (presumably by Joseph) to be pregnant with the result that righteous and compassionate Joseph decided to cancel the legal marriage created by their betrothal. This is the natural human evaluation of the “origin” of Jesus Christ. Since his origin is not from Joseph, Mary’s betrothed, it must have been from a sinful union between Mary and another man. Ironically, although the narrator has informed the hearers/readers that Mary is pregnant “from the Holy Spirit,” Joseph can act only on the basis of his own logical understanding of the child’s origin. Joseph’s plan to divorce Mary discreetly “would leave both his righteousness (his conformity to the law) and his compassion intact.” Joseph is, for the right reasons, about to do the wrong thing, but God intervenes. (CC)

The Law called for a betrothed woman to be stoned if she was guilty of adultery (Deut. 22:23-24). (TLSB)

THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT – εὑρεν αὐτήν ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσαν, “he found that she was pregnant” (cf. Mt 12:44; 24:46). ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου—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)

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** *righteous*. To Jews this meant being zealous in keeping the law. (CSB)

NOT WANT TO EXPOSE HER TO PUBLIC DISGRACE – δίκαιος ὢν καὶ μὴ θέλων αὐτήν δειγματίσαι—With others, I take the predicate position participles ὢν and θέλων to have causal force, so they are both translated with “because.” Joseph purposed to do what would have been right if his assumption that Mary had committed adultery had been right; he was acting for the right reason (“because he was a righteous man”; see further the commentary). But ironically, in this case it would have been the wrong thing to do! (CC)

By Jewish law Joseph had the right to bring his fiancée before a court of law to prove her infidelity, which could result in her being stoned to death (Deut 22:23-24). Or he could break the marriage contract by divorcing her quietly. He has much to agonize over because he loved Mary and was a just man.

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

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)

ἐβουλήθη λάθρα ἀπολῦσαι αὐτήν—Joseph would have had to divorce (ἀπολῦσαι) Mary because she was betrothed (μνηστευθείσης, 1:18) to him. According to Jewish custom, betrothal was a legally binding relationship that was the first stage of marriage. However, the marriage was consummated only after the betrothal period was completed. For a virgin, betrothal usually lasted for about one year. In the Mishnah, both *Ketuboth* 5:2 and *Nedarim* 10:5 mention a period of up to twelve months for a virgin and thirty days for a widow. During this time “the betrothed girl was legally the man’s wife even though she was still a virgin, since the marital relation did not begin until the nuptial ceremony. The betrothal could be abrogated only by a formal written divorce or death.” (CC)

Ironically, although the narrator has informed the hearers/readers that Mary is pregnant “from the Holy Spirit,” Joseph can act only on the basis of his own logical understanding of the child’s origin. Joseph’s plan to divorce Mary discreetly “would leave both his righteousness (his conformity to the law) and his compassion intact.” Joseph is, for the right reasons, about to do the wrong thing, but God intervenes. (CC)

In Joseph’s well-meaning incomprehension, we have the first glimpse of a powerfully important theme in Matthew’s Gospel, namely, that in order for human beings to know the ways of God and his Christ, those ways must be *revealed* to them. They cannot attain to this knowledge and faith by their “own reason or strength.” Whether it is the difference between those who did not repent at Jesus’ miracles and those who did (11:25–28) or those on whom the seed of the Word falls in vain and those in whom the seed bears fruit (13:1–9), what makes the difference is that humans fail to understand unless God *reveals* his purposes to save in Jesus. That revelation, moreover, possesses the power to evoke a trusting response in men and women, as Joseph will show in 1:24–25. (CC)

**1:20-23** The text’s next section (1:20–23) comprises the “counter move” of the text, as divine perspective suddenly supplants human understanding. God’s intervention and proclamation come to the reader from two “voices”: the angel’s words in Joseph’s dream and the OT citation to which Matthew’s readers/hearers are privy. (CC)

The angel’s words connect this text to the preceding context in two ways. First, the angel addresses Joseph as “son of David” (1:20), signaling that the royal line of David the king, presented in the genealogy (1:2–17) of Jesus, “Son of David” (1:1), has come down to this pious descendant and heir of David, Joseph. Because the heir of David will take Mary as his wife even though the child in her womb is not his own, this will bring Jesus into the royal line of David. The second connection with the preceding context is the emphasis on God’s perspective and guidance. The symmetry of Matthew’s genealogy (three sets of fourteen generations, 1:17) has already suggested that the God of Israel has been bringing the nation’s history to its climax in the One who is called “Christ” (1:1, 16). God’s guidance and intervention continue in the text at hand as the angel announces to Joseph the true origin of the child within Mary, Joseph’s virgin wife. (CC)

The angel communicates to Joseph both the origin (1:20) and the name (1:21) of the child. The child comes from no human father; the source is the Holy Spirit. This does not imply that the *Spirit* is to be regarded as the Father of Jesus. As Matthew will make clear in his Gospel, God is the Father of Jesus. The comments of Sánchez Merino are pertinent here, although he is initially referring to Lk 1:35:

The Spirit is neither the mother nor the father of the Son. Mary is Jesus' mother, God his Father. As an act of God's Spirit, however, the conception of "Emmanuel" (= "God with us") in the virgin ... directs us to Jesus' divine origin from the heavenly Father in that Jesus has no biological father (e.g. [Mt] 1:16, 2:11, 13). ... And yet the Spirit mediates the Father-Son relation in the economy of salvation, for the holy child Emmanuel is the messianic Son of God for us by means of the creative, fresh power in history of God's eschatological Spirit. (CC)

Chrysostom registers appropriate awe and modesty at the role of the Spirit in Jesus' conception:

Nor think that thou hast learnt all, by hearing "of the Spirit"; nay, for we are ignorant of many things, even when we have learnt this; as, for instance, how the Infinite is in a womb, how He that contains all things is carried, as unborn, by a woman; how the Virgin bears, and continues a virgin. How, I pray thee, did the Spirit frame that Temple? How did He take not all the flesh from the womb, but a part thereof, and increased it, and fashioned it? ... Therefore that He was of us, and of our substance, and of the Virgin's womb, is manifest from these things, and from others beside; but how, is not also manifest. Do not either thou then inquire; but receive what is revealed, and be not curious about what is kept secret. (CC)

Moreover, the child's purpose is revealed in the name given to him by God through the angelic messenger. The child's name will be "Jesus" (Ἰησοῦς, 1:21), a Greek form of the ancient Hebrew name "Joshua" (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ), which means "Yahweh/the LORD is salvation." The reader of the Greek is expected to recognize the Semitic play on the noun "salvation," since the following clause gives the reason why (γάρ) this will be his name: "He himself will save his people from their sins." Name and purpose go together; identity and work go hand in hand. From this point in the narrative, the very name "Jesus" will evoke the purpose for which this Jesus has come: the purpose of God saving his people from sin—from their own sins. (CC)

How and to what extent will Jesus save? Clearly, by his ransom-death (20:28) and his outpoured blood (26:28) on behalf of and in the place of "many," Jesus will pay the price needed to forgive. But there is more. Not only does God purpose to *forgive* sins, that is, remove the guilt of sin, but Jesus will also *save* people from their sins. As the remarkable citation of Is 53:4 in Mt 8:17 shows, salvation from sin entails healing and full eschatological restoration (see the commentary on 8:17 and also on 4:23–24; 9:1–7). In that sense, one must always keep in mind that there is an "already" and a "not yet" to the salvation from sin that Matthew's Gospel proclaims and that believers in this Gospel receive. The full salvation from sin awaits the day when this Jesus will return to

judge the living and the dead. For Jesus comes not to save just the souls of his people from their sins. He comes to save his people—body and soul—from their sins. (CC)

Jesus is conceived within Mary “from the Holy Spirit” (1:18, 20). Is a part of Matthew’s message in 1:18–25 the truth that by Jesus’ virginal conception from the Holy Spirit, he is also revealed as the Son of God, the God-man of classic creedal Christianity? Yes! But that truth is still muted in 1:18–25, for Matthew intends to communicate a particular message by proclaiming Jesus as Son of God. In this Gospel, Jesus’ identity as the Son of God first emerges explicitly in 2:15 and then is emphasized and repeated in 3:13–17 and 4:1–11. For Matthew, Jesus’ identity as Son of God involves Jesus’ deity to be sure. In Matthew 1–2, however, Jesus, Son of God, is the stand-in, the representative, and even the substitute *for the nation Israel*, who is God’s “son” (Ex 4:22; Deut 8:5; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:1, quoted in Mt 2:15). Jesus will show his perfect Sonship in perfect obedience to the Father’s plan to save. This commentary will revisit this “Son of God” Christology as the pertinent texts come under consideration. (CC)

The importance of the name “Jesus” emerges when we recognize that Matthew ends this unit by explicitly describing Joseph’s obedient response to the angel’s command to name the child “Jesus” (1:25). This saving personal name is (literally) the chapter’s last word! Yet before considering the conclusion of the text, the second name, “Immanuel” (1:22–23), must receive attention, along with important issues about its context. After the angel’s words give God’s perspective in 1:20–21, additional divine perspective emerges through the OT citation from Is 7:14. The child Jesus has origin in no human father, for he is born of a virgin, as the OT has foretold. As the first textual note on Mt 1:23 argues, Matthew’s wording of his quotation of Is 7:14 shows no theologically significant deviations from the LXX or the MT since παρθένος, “virgin,” is a valid rendering of עַלְמָה, “virgin maiden.” Now we must take in hand some of the complexities of Isaiah’s prophecies and the meaning both of Is 7:14 in its original context as well as Matthew’s proclamation that this verse is fulfilled in Jesus’ conception within the Virgin Mary. (CC)

**Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew’s Context** – In citing Is 7:14 in the first chapter of his Gospel, Matthew proclaims that the Immanuel promise that applied to the eighth century and also extended beyond that time into the future of God’s people has now come true. Although Matthew certainly does believe that Jesus fulfills some OT passages typologically, that is not what is happening in Mt 1:23 with his citation of Is 7:14. The threat to Judah in the eighth century was great. Yet after the Syro-Ephraimite coalition and even the Assyrian Empire had come and gone, still there was darkness over the people. God’s promise of light in Galilee of the Gentiles still awaited fulfillment (Is 8:23–9:6 [ET 9:1–7]). Matthew is proclaiming that fulfillment now in Jesus. (CC)

Is there any real indication that Matthew understood Is 7:14 as I have set forth here, that is, as a part of a progressive prophecy that comes to fuller expression in Is 8:23–9:6 (ET 9:1–7)? Indeed there is! We have been considering Matthew’s first explicit OT fulfillment citation, which is from Is 7:14, which in turn is the first “Immanuel” reference in its larger section of Isaiah. Now look ahead to Matthew’s fifth explicit OT fulfillment citation, which brings the first major section of the Gospel (1:1–4:16) to a close. The fifth citation comes

from the end of this same section of Isaiah: the promise of light shining in the darkness, in Galilee of the Gentiles (Mt 4:12–16, drawing on LXX Is 8:23–9:1 [ET 9:1–2]). *Matthew has bracketed his narrative's first major section with two citations from the "Immanuel" section of Isaiah.* Matthew recognizes that the promise of the Child born of the virgin, the promise that was connected to but *not* fulfilled in the birth of "The-Spoil-Speeds-the-Prey-Hastens," has finally come true. In Jesus, God is with his people to deliver them and to bring light to the nations. (CC)

The house of David in the eighth century BC did not accept God's offer of a sign, nor believe in the significance of the Child who was promised in Is 7:14. By contrast, Matthew presents Joseph as the descendant and heir of David who *does* accept God's offered sign and who *does* believe what God declares about the Child present in the Virgin Mary's womb. Matthew's readers/hearers are invited to believe as well! For all who believe the message of Matthew's Gospel, the Child will be known as "God is with us" (Mt 1:23, quoting Is 7:14). At the ending of the Gospel, as is widely recognized, Matthew repeats and broadens the promise. By saying "I am with you always" (28:20), Jesus affirms that he will be "God is with us." He will be with his disciples as they make other disciples through baptizing and teaching, even to the consummation of the age. (CC)

What are the Christological and soteriological implications, then, of Jesus being Immanuel, "God is with us"? Matthew is proclaiming Jesus as "the embodiment of all the salvific power found in the divine biblical [i.e., OT] assertion, 'I am with you.'" The role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' virginal conception underscores that Jesus *is* God's saving presence, for the Spirit is often associated with the OT promises of God's presence. Latent here in this early unit in Matthew's Gospel is the truth that the Nicene Creed faithfully confesses about Jesus of Nazareth: he is "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God." (CC)

Yet 1:18–25 does not give primary place and prominence to the name "Immanuel," as important as that OT citation is for understanding the significance of Mary's Child. Rather, after God has intervened and revealed the true origin and purpose of the Child, the text returns to the name "Jesus." God's presence with his people cannot be known apart from this Jesus whom the narrative ultimately will proclaim as the Crucified and Risen One. (CC)

**1:20 BUT** (GREEK and ESV IS "BEHOLD") – ἰδοὺ—This aorist imperative middle second person singular of ὁράω, "to see," functions as an interjection and is a favorite word of Matthew, who uses it sixty-two times. It emphasizes the point about to be made, and in some pericopes it is an obvious structuring device. Here it sets up a contrast between Joseph's plans and those of God. (CC)

ANGEL OF THE LORD – ἄγγελος κυρίου—Is this "*the* Angel of the LORD," the מַלְאָךְ-יהוה of the OT? The answer cannot be given merely on the basis of grammatical considerations. "The Angel of the LORD" is prominent in some OT passages that repeatedly refer to this figure. In each of these texts except Numbers 22, the LXX

translates at least the initial mention of the מַלְאָךְ־יְהוָה by ἄγγελος κυρίου, with both nouns lacking an article. Thereafter in these texts, most references to this figure are rendered ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου, a usage which, as Wallace suggests, is probably anaphoric, the article reaching back to the initial mention of ἄγγελος κυρίου. This same phenomenon occurs here in Matthew: the initial mention of the angel is anarthrous (1:20), and the second reference is arthrous (1:24). So, purely on grammatical grounds, the angel here in Mt 1:20 could be the OT figure of the מַלְאָךְ־יְהוָה. (CC)

However, two other factors speak decisively against making this identification. The first is that Matthew 1 shows no trace of the “vacillation” between the angelic figure and God himself that is so prominent and striking in the OT texts cited. (Neither does Mt 28:1–8, with an “angel of the Lord” in 28:2.) There is no uncertainty in Mt 1:18–25 over the question “Who is speaking, a created angel or the Lord himself?” It is the holy angel who speaks to Joseph. The second factor would be the Christological implications of the מַלְאָךְ־יְהוָה. Conservative interpreters have identified the OT “Angel of the LORD” as the preincarnate Son, or at least have declared the מַלְאָךְ־יְהוָה to be a true divine epiphany of Yahweh himself. This Christological or theophanic dimension is utterly absent from Mt 1:18–25, where an angelic messenger of the Lord speaks about the coming birth of God’s Son and in no way identifies himself with the Christ whose birth he announced. This second factor also militates against identifying the “angel of the Lord” in 2:13 and the one in 2:19 as the OT figure. (CC)

*in a dream.* The phrase occurs five times in the first two chapters of Matthew (here; 2:12–13, 19, 22) and indicates the means the Lord used for speaking to Joseph. (CSB)

This was a common means of revelation in the OT, especially in the story of the patriarch Joseph (Gn. 37-50). (TLSB)

*son of David.* Perhaps a hint that the message of the angel related to the expected Messiah. (CSB)

The angel’s words connect this text to the preceding context in two ways. First, the angel addresses Joseph as “son of David” (1:20), signaling that the royal line of David the king, presented in the genealogy (1:2–17) of Jesus, “Son of David” (1:1), has come down to this pious descendant and heir of David, Joseph. Because the heir of David will take Mary as his wife even though the child in her womb is not his own, this will bring Jesus into the royal line of David. The second connection with the preceding context is the emphasis on God’s perspective and guidance. The symmetry of Matthew’s genealogy (three sets of fourteen generations, 1:17) has already suggested that the God of Israel has been bringing the nation’s history to its climax in the One who is called “Christ” (1:1, 16). God’s guidance and intervention continue in the text at hand as the angel announces to Joseph the true origin of the child within Mary, Joseph’s virgin wife. (CC)

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

μὴ φοβηθῆς παραλαβεῖν Μαρίαν τὴν γυναῖκά σου.—The verb παραλαμβάνω usually means “take, take along.” In this context, however, it is virtually certain that this verb in 1:20, 24 refers to the action of Joseph that would be the next step after betrothal, namely, “to take” Mary “into his home” and begin to live with her as her husband, although Joseph did not yet consummate the marriage (1:25). (CC)

The syntactical relationship between the two accusative nouns “Mary” and “wife” is complex. One way to understand the syntax would take one accusative noun as the object of the verb and the other as a further complement to the object (also known as the predicate accusative). If that were the case here, the proper name “Mary” would be the object of the verb according to Wallace. The translation would then be, “Do not be afraid to take into your home Mary as your wife.” Two factors make this view unlikely, however. The first is that the second accusative noun is arthrous, τὴν γυναῖκά σου; normally, the complement (or predicate accusative) in such constructions will be anarthrous. The second factor is the general context, where, as 1:24 affirms, Mary is already regarded as Joseph’s wife even though they have not sexually consummated their union (as 1:18 and 1:25 declare). (CC)

Given the word order, with the proper name “Mary” immediately after the infinitive, the translation above reflects the view that “Mary” is the direct object of the infinitive and “your wife” is standing in apposition to “Mary”: “Do not be afraid to take into your home Mary, your wife.” ((CC)

*what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.* This agrees perfectly with the announcement to Mary (Lk 1:35), except that the latter is more specific (see note on Lk 1:26–35). (CSB)

τὸ ... γεννηθῆν—This is, literally, “the thing that has been begotten.” The neuter substantive participle probably reflects the grammatical gender of τὸ βρέφος, which can refer to a “child” in utero (e.g., Lk 1:41, 44) or after birth (e.g., Lk 2:12, 16; 18:15; 1 Pet 2:2). (CC)

**1:21 JESUS...SAVE HIS PEOPLE** – αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει—The nominative use of αὐτός is emphatic (“he *himself* will save”). There are twenty-one nominative uses of αὐτός in Matthew, all having an emphatic function; see, for example, 3:11; 8:24; 16:20. (CC)

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)

Moreover, the child’s purpose is revealed in the name given to him by God through the angelic messenger. The child’s name will be “Jesus” (Ἰησοῦς, 1:21), a Greek form of the ancient Hebrew name “Joshua” (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ), which means “Yahweh/the LORD is salvation.” The reader of the Greek is expected to recognize the Semitic play on the noun “salvation,” since the following clause gives the reason why (γάρ) this will be his name:

“He himself will save his people from their sins.” Name and purpose go together; identity and work go hand in hand. From this point in the narrative, the very name “Jesus” will evoke the purpose for which this Jesus has come: the purpose of God saving his people from sin—from their own sins. (CC)

**1:22** ALL THIS TOOK PLACE – τοῦτο δὲ ὅλον γέγονεν—There is no need to take the perfect indicative γέγονεν as simply aoristic. Rather, in this first occurrence of Matthew’s OT citation formula (see the next textual note), the perfect is somewhat emphatic. Matthew is stressing for the reader that “this whole thing,” referring to the “origin” (γένεσις, 1:1, 18) of Jesus Christ with its enduring result for the reader, “has happened” in order to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet. (CC)

Matthew may also be offering an opening bracket, which is matched with a closing bracket in 26:56 as part of Jesus’ statement to those arresting him: “But this whole thing has happened [τοῦτο δὲ ὅλον γέγονεν] in order that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled” (26:56). Such a connection between 1:22 and 26:56 underscores Matthew’s strong emphasis that Jesus’ entire life and ministry takes place in fulfillment of the OT. (CC)

*fulfill.* Twelve times (here; 2:15, 23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 27:9) 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)

ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος.—This the first of ten times where Matthew introduces an OT citation with his distinctive formula that uses the passive of πληρώω with the substantive participle τὸ ῥηθὲν as the subject: “that what was spoken ... might be fulfilled.” Mt 3:3 also comes very close to this expression, although there John the Baptist is not spoken of as one who *fulfills* the Scripture. Matthew reserves the important verb πληρώω, “fulfill,” for Jesus alone. (CC)

Commentators sometimes note that ὑπό plus the genitive (here ὑπὸ κυρίου) refers to an ultimate agent, while διὰ plus the genitive (διὰ τοῦ προφήτου) refers to an intermediate agent. It should not be thought, however, that each of those prepositions in itself always carries that respective force. Rather, it is the distinctive use of both prepositions in the same context that nails down the point. The Lord is the ultimate source of the prophecy; the prophet is only the intermediary who delivered the message to Israel. (CC)

**1:23** See note on Isa 7:14. This is the first of at least 47 quotations, most of them Messianic, that Matthew takes from the OT (see NIV text notes throughout Matthew).

Note on Is. 7:14 – 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. *Immanuel*.† The name “God is with us” was meant to convince Ahaz that God could rescue him from his enemies. See Nu 14:9; 2Ch 13:12; Ps 46:7. “Immanuel” is used again in 8:8, 10, and it may be another name for Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:3). If so, the boy’s names had complementary significance (see note on 8:3). 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). See Hos 11:1; Mt 2:15 for another example of God’s direction of Israel’s history in such a way as to let the event foreshadow what he would do in the life of his incarnate Son. (CC)

IMMANUEL – WHICH MEANS GOD WITH US – This is quote from Isaiah 7:14. The incarnation of Jesus is central to salvation. It means that Christ is really “with us” to take our place.

μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός—This is most likely a verbless clause, “God is with us,” rather than a Greek phrase that could be translated as a noun with a relative clause, “the God who is with us.” If Matthew had wanted to express the latter, he could have written ὁ θεὸς μεθ’ ἡμῶν, or ὁ μεθ’ ἡμῶν θεός, or ὁ θεὸς ὁ μεθ’ ἡμῶν. (CC)

ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ—The text form of this, Matthew’s first explicit OT citation, has occasioned much discussion. The Masoretic Text of Is 7:14b reads, “Look, the virgin maiden [הַמְלָאָה] (will be) pregnant [adjective, הָרָה] and be bearing [feminine singular active participle, וְיֹלְדָת] a son, and she will call [וְקָרָאתָ] his name Immanu-El.” The LXX rendering is “Look, the virgin [ἡ παρθένος] will be pregnant, and she will bear a son, and you [singular] will call [καλέσεις] his name Immanuel.” Matthew follows the LXX closely, with the one exception of the verb at the end of the verse, where he has “they will call” (καλέσουσιν). (CC)

The hermeneutics and theology of this citation will receive attention in the commentary proper. The following notes here are offered with regard to two aspects of the text form: (1) the choice of ἡ παρθένος for הַמְלָאָה and (2) the person and number of the verb “call” at the end of the citation. (CC)

Some scholars criticize Matthew for “conveniently” using the LXX’s rendering, ἡ παρθένος, of the MT’s הַמְלָאָה in order to find an OT proof text for the virginal conception and birth of Jesus. This criticism asserts that παρθένος, which normally means “virgin,” is not a valid translation for the Hebrew מְלָאָה. This Hebrew noun, however, only occurs nine times in the OT, and two of these occurrences seem not to be pertinent (the plural seems to be a musical term in Ps 46:1 [the superscription in English translations] and 1 Chr 15:20). Of the remaining seven, four times the LXX renders the Hebrew noun as νεᾱνίς, “young woman” (Ex 2:8; Ps 67:26 [MT 68:26; ET 68:25]); Song 1:3; 6:8), once as νεότης, “youth” (Prov 30:19), and twice as παρθένος, “virgin” (Gen 24:43; Is 7:14).

With such a small base of data, it is difficult to assert that the LXX's rendering in Is 7:14 is somehow anomalous or invalid, or that there is a "normal" Greek translation for the Hebrew term. What, however, do the various Hebrew and Greek terms mean, and what semantic difference is there between them? (CC)

One must be cautious here by not quickly asserting a technical or unchanging meaning for individual words. For example, it is clear enough from the narrative of Genesis 24 that Rebekah is regarded as an acceptable candidate for becoming a wife for Isaac, that is, she was a virgin as well as a relative. In the Hebrew of Genesis 24, she is described as a "woman" (אִשָּׁה, Gen 24:44), a "young woman" (נַעֲרָה, 24:16a), a "virgin" (בְּתוּלָה, 24:16b), and a "virgin maiden" (עַלְמָה, 24:43). The LXX account of Genesis 24 translates *all* of the last three Hebrew nouns in the same way: with παρθένος. This would seem to indicate some flexibility when it comes to the meaning of παρθένος, or perhaps more likely the translator's willingness to allow the contextual connotations to guide to a more precise translation of a generic Hebrew term (such as נַעֲרָה). One only needs to read lexicon entries to see that; the context determines which of a word's many possible meanings is intended in a particular case, and context can cause the meanings of individual words to shift. (CC)

Some argue that בְּתוּלָה (e.g., Gen 24:16; Ex 22:15–16), and not עַלְמָה (Is 7:14 et alii), is the Hebrew term that means "virgin." However, it would be wrong to presume that Hebrew (or any language) could have only one term meaning "virgin." Granted, בְּתוּלָה usually does denote a "virgin." Yet we are hard pressed to explain why the biblical writers occasionally felt the need to further delineate a בְּתוּלָה as one "who has not known a man" unless עַלְמָה could possibly have a more general meaning, such as "young woman." If it always and exclusively meant "virgin," that would result in an odd sort of redundancy in Gen 24:16 and Judg 21:12. Why would an author say that a woman was "a virgin who had not known a man"? How could there be virgins who *had* known men? (CC)

With regard to עַלְמָה, the term in Is 7:14, it clearly does refer to a virgin in at least two of the six other passages: Rebekah in Gen 24:43 and Miriam as a girl in Ex 2:8. The plural in Ps 68:26 (ET 68:25) and Song 1:3; 6:8 may well mean "virgins." The only passage in which its meaning can really be disputed is Prov 30:19, but that verse may well refer to "the way of a man with a virgin" whom he is courting. None of the seven OT passages with עַלְמָה give any reason to conclude that it cannot mean "virgin." Thus Davies and Allison rightly comment that the Hebrew noun עַלְמָה is "a little used word generally carrying the implication of virginity." (CC)

In terms of the lexical data, then, it should not be said that the LXX's παρθένος is a mistranslation of the MT's עַלְמָה in Is 7:14. The Hebrew noun עַלְמָה clearly can mean "virgin maiden" and as such is closely related to בְּתוּלָה, which also normally (but not necessarily) means "virgin." The Greek term παρθένος is a perfectly acceptable translation for עַלְמָה in Is 7:14, and Matthew's use of παρθένος in his Greek quotation of Is 7:14 does not involve some sort of semantic error. The female referred to in Is 7:14 is

a virgin maiden. This is fitting, since her bearing of the child will be a *sign* that “the LORD himself will give” (Is 7:14). (CC)

The second issue in the text of Is 7:14 as cited in Mt 1:23 involves the final verb of the citation. Matthew writes καλέσουσιν, “*they* will call his name ...” The LXX has the second person singular καλέσεις, “*you* [either masculine or feminine] will call ...” The MT verb form is יִקְרָא, which poses some interesting challenges. Morphologically, this would be the normal form of the Qal second feminine singular perfect of קָרָא with *waw* consecutive, “and *you* [feminine singular] will call.” This may be the way that the LXX is understanding the form, although the Greek καλέσεις does not specify whether the subject of the verb is masculine or feminine. (CC)

However, in the immediate context, Isaiah clearly has been speaking to “the house of David” (Is 7:2) in the person of King Ahaz, not to any woman who would name the child. Rather, he has been speaking in the third person *about* the virgin who would bear the child. Therefore, the Hebrew grammars and most scholars take the MT’s Hebrew verb form as an archaic *third* feminine singular perfect with *waw* consecutive: “and *she* will call.” (CC)

To further complicate the picture, one of the Isaiah texts found at Qumran has the reading יִקְרָא, which could be pointed as a Pual perfect, “and it [his name] shall be called,” or as a Qal perfect, “and he/one shall call.” (CC)

Given the uncertainties and multiple possibilities of translation (even of the consonantal MT), it seems proper not to make too much of Matthew’s apparently unique reading, “they will call.” As the commentary on subsequent OT citations will show, there are clear cases in which Matthew has offered the wording of an OT passage in such a way as to make purposeful connections with other aspects of his Gospel’s theology. But in this case, caution is appropriate. Some have suggested that perhaps the “they” of Matthew’s text refers to the people whom Jesus will save from their sins—those who, at the end of the Gospel and beyond, believe that Jesus is with them to the end of the age. This may well be correct. (CC)

This caution in attaching theological significance to Matthew’s reading “they will call” offers an opportunity for a general caution about the work of comparing the text forms of Matthew’s OT citations with the texts of the MT and the LXX. The work of establishing and comparing these text forms is an important endeavor that requires enormous patience and learning. One soon learns that the field of textual criticism is itself undergoing significant changes and that *certainty* regarding matters like the text of the Septuagint may be more elusive than the impression that is sometimes given. In addition, one should never forget the historical, human circumstances under which the divinely inspired—but still human—authors of the NT operated. Their copies of the OT were almost certainly in scroll form. There may well have been times when they cited the OT in their writings from memory, rather than directly looking at a reference while writing and copying. (CC)

Therefore, one should be slow to make much of small matters and quick to remember that some decisions regarding the “original text” used by an author must remain somewhat conjectural. As such, perceived variations in the OT text cited by Matthew do not always offer a foundation broad enough to support significant theological conclusions. In my examinations of the text form of Matthew’s OT citations, I shall attempt to focus on relatively certain and significant data when drawing conclusions about Matthew’s *theological* purposes for citing the OT when and how he does. (CC)

**1:24-25** The text’s third and final section (1:24–25) reveals that Joseph, the “righteous” (1:19) son of David (1:20) in contrast to wicked King Ahaz, believed God’s prophecy and obeyed the divine command. Joseph believed the angel, and the reader believes both the angel and the OT. Joseph got up and did as he was commanded. His faith in God’s interpretation of the events is shown by his about-face, doing what he earlier feared to do (“Do not be afraid to take into your home Mary, your wife,” 1:20); so “He took his wife into his home” (1:24). With one last flourish to reinforce the message that Jesus’ origin is not from a human father, the text emphatically states that Joseph *continued* not to know (οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν, 1:25) Mary sexually. The last weight of emphasis falls upon the salvific name: “And he called his name Jesus” (1:25). (CC)

**1:24 DID WHAT THE ANGEL...COMMANDED** – Joseph believed the angel, and the reader believes both the angel and the OT. Joseph got up and did as he was commanded. His faith in God’s interpretation of the events is shown by his about-face, doing what he earlier feared to do (“Do not be afraid to take into your home Mary, your wife,” 1:20); so “He took his wife into his home” (1:24). With one last flourish to reinforce the message that Jesus’ origin is not from a human father, the text emphatically states that Joseph *continued* not to know (οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν, 1:25) Mary sexually. The last weight of emphasis falls upon the salvific name: “And he called his name Jesus” (1:25). (CC)

In contrast to King Ahaz, who doubted Isaiah’s prophecy, Joseph showed that he believed the word of the Lord. (TLSB)

**1:25 NO UNION WITH HER...SHE GAVE BIRTH** – καὶ οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν αὐτὴν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν—The conjunction καί is adversative, contrasting this clause with what went before; “but” is the proper translation. For this use of καί, see 11:17, 19 (last occurrence); 14:13; 17:16 (last occurrence); 21:30; 22:3 (last occurrence); 23:3 (last occurrence), 37 (last occurrence); BDF, § 442.1. (CC)

The imperfect indicative ἐγίνωσκεν is noteworthy. By it the narrator leaves no doubt in the reader’s mind regarding Jesus Christ’s origin: it is from God and not from man. Joseph plays no active role in the origin of Jesus, since he “continued not knowing” Mary “until she gave birth to a son.” (CC)

Matthew’s Gospel contains a number of sentences whose negated main verb is qualified by an “until” (ἕως) clause. One sentence even has *two* such clauses; see the note at 5:18. The questions naturally arise: (1) Does the “until” clause postulate a time beyond which the reversal of the main clause will actually occur? Or (2) is the “until”

clause merely a way of saying that the main clause will remain true permanently? The specific question here in 1:25 is whether or not the verse implies that Joseph *did* begin to know Mary *after* she bore Jesus. The answer for any given example can only be based on the context, and not on the grammar alone, for in terms of grammar there are examples of precisely parallel “until” clauses on either side of this semantic fence; compare 17:9 (expected reversal of main clause) and 23:39 (no expected reversal of main clause). In light of 13:55–56, understood according to its most natural reading, the answer here for 1:25 would seem to be yes: Joseph did begin to know Mary after she had given birth to Jesus. (CC)