

SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 12.18.2016
THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 7:10-16

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹⁰ Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as **Sheol** or high as heaven. ¹² But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. ¹³ Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the **young woman** is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him **Immanuel**. ¹⁵ He shall *eat curds and honey* by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

Matthew 1:18-25

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹⁸ Now the **BIRTH** of Jesus the **MESSIAH** took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been *engaged* to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a *righteous* man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to *dismiss her quietly*. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him **Jesus**, for he will **SAVE HIS PEOPLE** from their sins.' ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ 'Look, the **virgin** shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him **Emmanuel**, which means, 'God is with us.'

²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him **Jesus**.

This chapter in the Book of Isaiah is the second part of a story about an encounter between the prophet Isaiah and the Judean king Ahaz. The beginning of Isaiah 7 locates the story during the conflict of 734-733 BCE, when the Kings of Israel (also called Ephraim) and Aram attempted to invade Jerusalem and replace Ahaz with a puppet ruler who would support their coalition against Assyria (Isaiah 7:1, 5-6; 2 Kings 16:5-9).

Although we learn immediately that the invasion was unsuccessful (see Isa 7:1), the events of the story take place before its outcome is known. Ahaz and his subjects are terrified at the impending attack (7:2), which threatens not only the survival of the nation but also the promise that a descendant of David would always reign in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 7:11-16). In this time of national terror, YHWH sends Isaiah to reassure Ahaz of divine protection.

Feasting on the Word. Year A, Vol 1, p. 75

Ahaz:: Ahaz's reign as king commenced at the age of 20, in the 17th year of the reign of Pekah of Israel. It is described in 2 Kings 16; Isaiah 7-9; and 2 Chronicles 28. Immediately upon his accession Ahaz had to meet a coalition formed by northern Israel, under King Pekah, and Damascus (Syria). These kings wished to compel him to join them in opposing the Assyrians, who were arming a force against the Northern Kingdom. To protect himself Ahaz called in the aid of the Assyrians who then sacked Damascus and annexed Aram, deporting their inhabitants. The Assyrian King then attacked and conquered Israel deporting the people to Assyria.

Through Assyria's intervention, and as a result of its invasion and subjection of the kingdom of Damascus and the Kingdom of Israel, Ahaz was relieved of his troublesome neighbors; but his protector henceforth claimed and held suzerainty over his kingdom. This appeal to Assyria met with stern opposition from the prophet Isaiah, who counseled Ahaz to rely upon the Lord and not upon outside aid. (wikipedia)

young woman | virgin:: this paragraph.

Immanuel:: (Hebrew: עִמָּנוּאֵל meaning, "God with us"; also written today as Emmanuel,) is a Hebrew name which appears in chapters 7 and 8 of the Book of Isaiah as part of a prophecy of God's protection from rival kings during the life of Jeshurun. Immanuel is wound into the book, among descriptions of historical events and the future. In Judaism the name עִמָּנוּאֵל ("Immanuel") is not applied to the messiah, as is done in Christianity (as it is in Matthew 1:23).

Sheol:: a place of darkness to which all the dead go. The idea here is one of size and depth, Sheol and the heavens mark the extreme limits or boundaries of the created order in which God dwells. This confidence giving sign will be huger than can ever be imagined.

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

These scripture are intertwined in our readings and thinking of Jesus. Isaiah 7:14 is quoted in Matthew 1:23. Matthew is going out of his way, as he begins his account of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the incarnation of God with us in our world, to draw a direct connection between the prophetic promises of homecoming from the Exile in Babylon to the life of Jesus in the 1st century. While both stories can be heard and understood independently of one another, it's when we read Matthew through the lens of Isaiah that we hear a different level of the message: one of continuity and newness, of a new creation from God.

***How are these passages pointed to in promise of 2 Corinthians 5:17 which says "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"?**

***How do you hunger for "new creation" in your life?; in our world today?**

***How do you experience the promise, promise and passion of God with us – God with you – in your life?; in our city?; in our shared world? Talk with God of how you want eyes with which to see more of the Divine Presence in our world today.**

eat curds and honey:: this is an expression indicating the weaning of the child, that the child no longer subsists on mother's milk but on solid foods. In siege warfare, which is how their enemies would have threatened Ahaz and Jerusalem, a city was cut off and the inhabitants starved into submission. The prophetic word promises that food will be readily available in the future, implying that Jerusalem will no longer be under siege.

Through Assyria's intervention, and as a result of its invasion and subjection of the kingdom of Damascus and the Kingdom of Israel, Ahaz was relieved of his troublesome neighbors; but his protector henceforth claimed and held suzerainty over his kingdom. This appeal to Assyria met with stern opposition from the prophet Isaiah, who counseled Ahaz to rely upon the Lord and not upon outside aid. (*Wikipedia*)

young woman | virgin:: in Hebrew the term '*alahah* (meaning young girl or a woman of marriageable age was translated with the Greek term *parthenos* which means "virgin." In Hebrew a different word "*betulah*" would most likely have been used to denote the more specific idea of virginity. Who then is this woman? A young woman to marry the king?; the mother of a future king?; a subject of eschatological prophecy?; Is it pointing to Mary as it's understood in Matthew 1:23? How do you understand it? How central is it to the birth story?

Matthew: While it's the first gospel chronologically in the Bible, Matthew is generally believed to have been written using the existing gospel of Mark (between 70 and 90ad). It was most likely destined for Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in Syria, maybe Antioch (which was the 3rd largest city in the Roman Empire). Unlike Luke, Matthew doesn't take the time to explain Jewish customs, hence it's assumed his audience knew those things.

BIRTH :: the Greek word used here is actually "γένεση" or Genesis which can mean origin, beginning or birth. Both here in 1:18 and in 1:1 "An account of the genealogy [γένεση] of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Matthew uses this word which is the title of the first book of the Bible, as opposed to using the more classic γεννάω or [gennaō] to say "birth". Is Matthew talking about more than physical birth? Tying Jesus back to the Genesis of our relationship with God, expressed in the first book of the Bible (תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה, be-re-shit) translated as *Genesis* in Greek and then English. It's not just the first book of the Bible, but the literal first word as well.

MESSIAH:: in Hebrew the word means "anointed one" as in a king, or promised leader. In Greek the word is translated to Christos, from which comes the word Christ.

a *righteous* man :: righteous means someone whose heart is after God's heart, who wholly follows God's law or way of life. Here it means that he must follow the Torah law, divorcing his unfaithful wife (inexplicably pregnant). The law doesn't allow for him to forgive and forget. He intends to do so quietly, to not shame her, and to protect her life (as her "sin" was worthy of death). But before he is

Engaged... dismiss her quietly :: the reversal

Jesus, for he will **SAVE HIS PEOPLE** :: the name Jesus is a derivative of the Hebrew name *Joshua* which means "salvation" or "God saves." Hebrew speakers would have picked up on the double entendre in this phrase. He comes not to save the people of God (the Jews) but his people. Does that point to the Gentiles?

son of David:: the beginning of Matthew, chapter 1:1-17 immediately preceding this passage contains the genealogy, tracing the ancestry of Jesus back to Abraham, the father of the Jews, identifying Jesus as a son of David, part of the royal line. Here we learn that he is so, but through Joseph who is not his biological father.