



RockPointe Small Groups

The Advent of Christ • God Keeps His Promises • Isaiah 7:10-16; Matthew 1:18-25 •
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MAIN POINT

We live with true hope because God always keeps His promises—past, present, and future.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the worst Christmas season you've ever had? What made it so bad?

During that difficult season, in what or whom were you placing your hope?

How have you trusted God even when life circumstances made trusting Him difficult?

The way we react in tough seasons of life reveals the source of our hope. For some people hope is found in a spouse, a job, or even children. However, Advent is a reminder for us that our hope should be found in one place alone—Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas and whose return we anxiously hope for. This text reminds us that the hope of God's people has come home in Jesus.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah faced the threat of attack by an alliance of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Aram (Syria). Isaiah urged Judah to trust in God for its deliverance, promising defeat for its enemies and for all nations opposing the Lord. Isaiah 7:1-16 tells of Isaiah's bringing good news to Ahaz, king of Judah, concerning the threats of Israel and Aram.

Have a volunteer read Isaiah 7:10-16.

The Lord promised Ahaz deliverance if he would turn to Him in faith. The Lord even offered to prove this was not a trick and to show He was sincere in making this offer. God permitted Ahaz to ask for any sign he wanted. Ahaz knew God had redeemed His people from Egypt, brought them into Canaan, and established His covenant with them and their descendants. God's past faithfulness and goodness should have encouraged Ahaz to trust Him in the present.

What do you think of God's invitation for Ahaz to test Him?

Ahaz was an ungodly man who participated in pagan worship and dishonored God's temple. What did his statement in verse 12 imply?

Read 2 Kings 16:7-9. What was Ahaz's alternative plan?

Ahaz masked his lack of trust in God with false humility. What examples have you seen of people covering up their sin with a veneer of virtue?

When was the last time you did this?

Reflecting on the ways God has been faithful to you in the past is one of the best ways to maintain hope and confidence in Him through your present circumstances. What is one obstacle that keeps you from reflecting on God's past faithfulness?

Sometimes we can use pious language in an impious manner. We can quote passages out of context and misuse God's Word to support our lack of faith and selfish desires. Disobedience characterized Ahaz's life (see 2 Kings 16:1-4). His refusal of a divine sign indicated his decision not to trust God.

Look again at verse 14. What is the sign that the Lord will give to Ahaz anyway? How does this sign fit the crisis?

Immanuel means "God with us." What was this name supposed to communicate to Ahaz? What does it mean to you?

Despite Ahaz's refusal to request a sign, God provided a sign to confirm His word. The virgin would bear a son, and name him Immanuel. The name Immanuel means "God with us" and occurs only in Isaiah (Isa. 7:14; 8:8) in the Old Testament. While the name can be understood negatively as God coming to be with us to bring judgment (Isa. 8:8), the phrase God with us primarily connotes God's saving presence (Ps. 46:7). Isaiah later used the translation of the name to express God's protection of His people against threat (Isa. 8:10) indicating Isaiah saw the name as a positive sign of God's presence. Centuries later, Matthew described to a faithless world how this sign pointed to the birth of the Messiah, an event with both immediate and future fulfillment. The following passage from Matthew describes the incarnation—when the Son of God, second Person of the Trinity, came to earth as Jesus, our Savior.

Have a volunteer read Matthew 1:18-25.

What catches your attention most in this very familiar account from the Christmas story?

What do you learn about Joseph from these verses?

Verse 21 contains the most important part of the angel's revelation—Jesus' name revealed His purpose. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "Yahweh saves." God Himself was coming to earth with the goal of saving people, rescuing sinners from the punishment they deserve. Jesus was the exact baby to which Isaiah had referred 700 hundred years before. And to reinforce that fact, Matthew quoted from Isaiah 7:14 in verse 23.

Why was it important for Him to become like us and be born as a baby?

How have you seen Jesus as "Immanuel" in your life lately?

The fact that God Himself came to Earth in full humanity means we don't worship or pray to a God who has no understanding of our struggles. For 33 years, Jesus lived with the temptations, restrictions, and limitations we all face in a world marred by sin and constrained to time. Not only is He merciful and all-knowing, but we have the assurance He is empathetic as well.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some practical things that you can do during the Christmas season to focus on Christ as the hope of your life?

Is there something God has asked you to do that you haven't followed through on? How could you take steps toward obedience this week?

How would you describe the daily impact of "God With Us" in your life?

Is there someone on your heart right now who needs to know the hope Christ gives? How can you create the opportunity to share it with them this week?

PRAYER

Close today's meeting with a time of prayer for the faith journeys of the people in your group. Through prayer, encourage the group with promises from Scripture about God's goodness and love for them.

COMMENTARY

Isaiah 7:10-16

7:10-11. The Lord promised Ahaz deliverance if he would turn to Him in faith. The Lord even offered to prove this was not a trick and to show He was sincere in making this offer. God promised He would provide the king with a sign to confirm the truth of this message given through the prophet.

In fact, Ahaz could choose the sign for God to give him, and the range of his choices is amazing. He could select anything from the depths of Sheol to the heights of heaven. The use of the two distant extremes is a figure of speech meaning that he could ask anything as a sign and God would perform it.

7:12. Ahaz refused to ask for a sign and used the excuse of not wanting to test the Lord. Some see the response of Ahaz as falsely pious but perhaps it was more. The prohibition against putting the Lord to the test in Scripture (Deut. 6:16) prohibits faithless complaining by His people. Here the Lord asked Ahaz to request a sign and he refused. Perhaps Ahaz lacked even the faith to believe in a sign, much less that God would deliver him and his people. This was God's command but Ahaz disobeyed it.

7:13. The Lord responded angrily to Ahaz's refusal to ask for a sign. House of David in this verse refers specifically to Ahaz. He tested the patience of men (his subjects) and worse he tried the patience of God.

7:14. Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, but the Lord revealed He would give a sign nevertheless. The Lord would choose the sign and explain its significance. Isaiah prophesied the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and name him Immanuel, meaning "God with us." How is this prophecy to be interpreted? In particular, in light of its use in Matthew 1:21-23 in reference to the birth of Jesus, what did this prophecy mean in Isaiah's day? Two primary interpretations exist.

The first view considers the prophecy as a prediction referring only to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. This would mean the prophecy had no fulfillment in Isaiah's day. Those who prefer this interpretation point out that the virgin will conceive. According to this interpretation the prophecy was given not specifically to Ahaz but to the "house of David" (Isa. 7:13). They point out the Greek word for "virgin" in Matthew 1:23 refers to a woman who has never had sexual relations.

The question is not whether Isaiah 7:14 refers to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. All agree that this is true. The question is whether it also had partial fulfillment in Isaiah's day. Could the prophecy in any way refer to another woman and another child?

A second interpretation of this passage says there was a partial fulfillment of this prophecy in the time of Ahaz. In this interpretation the sign would refer to a young, unmarried woman who was a virgin at the time the prophecy was made. She would marry later and have a son. But before he was old enough to know right from wrong (Isa. 7:16), the two kings feared in the Israel-Aram alliance would be dead.

This interpretation does not imply a virgin birth in Isaiah's day. Partial fulfillment in Isaiah's day in no way detracts from the ultimate fulfillment in the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus Christ referred to in Matthew 1:21-23.

7:16. This verse refers primarily to the child born as a sign to Ahaz and Judah in Isaiah's day. The sign revealed deliverance from the Israel-Aram threat would occur in a period of about three years (about a year for the pregnancy and before the child was three years old). This interpretation accords well with the historical events of Assyria's invasion of Aram and the execution of Rezin, King of Aram two years later in 732 B.C. The name "Immanuel" conveys the presence of God to protect and save. The title applies in the fullest sense to Jesus Christ the God-Man.

Scripture reveals that Ahaz unfortunately did not respond to the Lord with faith and obedience. He turned to the pagan nation of Assyria for help rather than to God (2 Kings 16:7-10). The disastrous consequences did not mean destruction for Judah, but the nation was forced to pay heavy tribute and suffered needlessly. All of this happened because Ahaz refused to trust God.

Matthew 1:18-25

1:18. As Matthew launched the account of Jesus' birth, note that he was careful to highlight the title Christ—the title he used in the preceding passage that demonstrated Jesus had the right to claim deity. Watch for Matthew's use of this title throughout his Gospel. His purpose in writing was to make the case for Jesus as the promised King. Why is it so important that the Christ, the promised king, be born to a virgin? The virgin birth is more than a miracle to draw attention to the unique nature of this child. Because Mary was a virgin, only God could have been the father of Jesus, making Jesus the one and only God-Man in all the universe. God's plan would have been impossible if Jesus had been anything less.

1:19. A betrothed couple was as good as married, and breaking off the relationship was seen as divorce, even though the couple had not yet been married. It also helps us gain a better perspective of the emotional state of Mary and Joseph when we realize that she was probably in her teens at the time of these events. The minimum marriageable age in Israel was twelve for women and thirteen for men. To remain unmarried as late as one's twenties may have been cause for social embarrassment.

1:20-21. Mary, initially fearful of being an unwed mother, accepted God's revealed intentions for her. And Joseph, initially not all that sure himself about the "virgin birth," was originally thinking divorce, albeit quietly and with no public scandal. But when Joseph was approached by God through the angel, he accepted his role and did precisely as he was instructed by God. He kept Mary a virgin until after Jesus was born, after which their normal marital relations produced other children who were the half-brothers of Jesus. And Joseph, as the legal heir to the throne, named their son "Jesus" as he was told. Mary and Joseph learned that the only way to follow God was to "trust and obey" His word. The character of these two young adults reminds us that God fulfills His purposes by using people of strong character and unquestioning obedience.

The name Jesus chosen by God for His Son (1:21) was, in that day and for centuries before, a common name with special meaning. Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Joshua, meaning "Yahweh is salvation." Jewish boys for centuries had been given this name Jesus with the frequency of today's John or Mike. This reflects, in part, the hope of Jewish parents for God's salvation from centuries of oppression under a succession of world powers. God's choice of such a common name, when He could have chosen something unique, also emphasized that Jesus came in a way that identified with "the average Joe." He came in love to become one of us, that we might be drawn to Him and become one of His. Jesus was approachable and touchable. He was one of us. "We do not have a high Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb. 4:15). Jesus did everything to build bridges to us.

1:22-23. In these verses Matthew provided the first of many direct quotes from the Old Testament, and the first of many Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by the earthly life of Jesus. These Old Testament

quotes and prophecies show, in part, the linkage and unity between the Old and New Testaments, helping us understand how God was preparing the way for the Christ from centuries past. They also validate the identity of Jesus as the promised Messiah, strengthening our faith in Him. And their perfect fulfillment in Jesus gives us confidence that God is faithful and mighty to keep His word to us today.

Matthew is quick to support the doctrine of the virgin birth, and his quote in 1:23 is from Isaiah 7:14, originally written by the prophet Isaiah over seven hundred years before Jesus' birth. This verse in its original Old Testament context seems to be referring to a child who was to be born in that setting of Isaiah's day, rather than centuries later. However, Matthew's inspired revelation fills the original statement out to its full intention. God is never so clearly present with His people as He is through His virgin-born Son, the Messiah of Israel. Jesus is Immanuel! The linguistic components of the name Immanuel and their individual translations—Im = "with," anu = "us," and el = "God"—make it clear that Isaiah's original prophecy could refer in its fullest sense only to the promised Messiah. This name of Jesus is a strong argument for His deity.

1:24-25. The dream that had begun for Joseph in verse 20 ends in these verses with him waking and choosing to obey everything the angel had told him to do. This fine man had learned to "trust and obey."