



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for December 24, 2020
“Signs: Son”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Isaiah 7:10-16

Protocol for the Nativity during a Pandemic

- A maximum of 4 shepherds will be permitted.
- Everyone is required to wear a mask and observe social distancing.
- Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus will be able to stay together as they form a family bubble.
- The donkey and the ox will have to obtain a declaration of non-contamination certified by the Department of Agriculture.
- Since they come from afar, the three wise men will be subject to a 14-day quarantine.
- All straw must be disinfected with an approved sanitizer.
- The angel is not allowed to fly overhead due to the aerosol effect produced by the batting of his wings.
- The heavenly host is not allowed to sing because of the same aerosol effect.
- And finally, no shepherd shall be more than 65 years old or in a vulnerable category.

Well enough of that. Let's get to this evening's scripture. It is from Isaiah 7:10-16. Let's hear what the prophet has to say about the coming Messiah.

Isaiah 7:10-16

Again, the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for 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.

A Little Gift Is on the Way

A woman had waited until the last minute to send Christmas cards. She rushed into a store and bought a package of 50 without really looking at them. Still in a big hurry, she addressed 49 of the 50 without reading the message on the inside. On Christmas Day when things were a little less hurried, she happened upon that last card and read it.

"This little card is just to say, a little gift is on the way." Suddenly she realized that 49 of her friends were expecting a gift from her that would never come.

The message of this night is that a little gift is on the way for which every one of us needs to be thankful.

Prophecy Fulfilled

The signs of Christmas are all around us. The streets are adorned with lights, our homes are decorated, and gifts have been wrapped. We wait now in anticipation of the great day.

For centuries persons also waited in anticipation. They waited for a sign that would signal a brand-new day.

During the 8th century B.C., the prophet Isaiah spoke of a sign, a sign that would usher in a brand-new kingdom. He spoke of a child who would be born to a virgin whose name would be Immanuel, which means God with us. Centuries later God saw fit to fulfill that prophecy.

Matthew references that prophecy in offering his account of Christ's birth.

He writes in Matthew 1:22-23, *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means, God with us."*

Luke has an angel of the Lord delivering the news.

In speaking to a group of shepherds, and with the glory of the Lord shining in all its brilliance, the angel said, *"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; and he is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

Luke 2:10-12

With that, the heavenly host joined the angel with a chorus of loud rejoicing, *"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those upon whom his favor rests."*

The signs of God were all around. His glory shone brightly, the angel's news was good, and the heavenly host's song was, well, heavenly.

The most important sign though was the one that laid in the manger. All the trappings of a centuries-old prophecy, the brightness of God's glory, the angel's pronouncement, and the singing of the heavenly host couldn't trump the glorious sign of that baby.

Amid all the signs that are around us this season of the year, it is the consideration of God's Son that puts us right where we need to be. It is what we do here tonight.

Think of it, God has intersected life in a powerful way. His son is born and through him we are able to share in abundant life now and eternal life later on.

Went to See, Left to Tell

Each Christmas I am left to ponder what the shepherds did in response to what they had witnessed. In a word, the shepherds went to see and then left to tell.

The scripture says that they left *“glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”*

The shepherds knew they had been in the presence of someone very special and they just couldn't contain themselves. They left that humble stable to tell everyone they met about the things they had seen and experienced.

I pray that you too see the signs of Christ around us and experience them to the full, and upon experiencing them you return to your everyday life glorifying and praising God for the great thing he has done.

The Christmas Star

We talked earlier in Advent about the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. On Monday, people gathered outside their homes right at dusk to see what has been dubbed, *“The Christmas Star.”*

I was leaving the church on Monday evening when I noticed a guy in our parking lot. He had telescope set up with a whole host of cameras. I knew what he was doing, but I stopped anyway to inquire. He was from Michigan and had driven all day to find some clear skies. I still don't know how he ended up in our parking lot.

Interestingly, this fellow wanted to capture the conjunction right over our steeple. He sent me the photos just yesterday. It is simply wonderful.

Monday was quite a night. I witnessed the conjunction with our next store neighbors at the end of our circle. We were all inspired.

I recalled Psalm 19 where it says, *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies the work of his hands.”* Psalm 19:1

I also recalled the star that guided the Wisemen, even though they visited Christ sometime after his birth. Above all things I reflected on the night Christ was born and the great thing God had done in sending his Son.

I was awestruck on Monday and I am awestruck tonight as we consider the great thing God has done.

“Glory to God in the highest!”