

Nativity of Our Lord

December 24, 2024



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

“There are many of you in this congregation who think to yourselves: ‘If only I had been there! How quick I would have been to help the Baby!’ You say that because you know how great Christ is... Why don’t you do it now? You have Christ in your neighbor. You ought to serve him, for what you do to your neighbor in need you do to the Lord Christ himself.”

–Martin Luther–
Christmas Book, p. 31

Isaiah 7:10–14

The lesser-known Canadian rock group, *Five Man Electrical Band*, had a top 10 hit in 1971 with a catchy song entitled, “Signs, Signs, Everywhere a Sign.” This song 40+ years later still contains a relevant message about the many signs that are all around us. Some signs we see are very clear and direct, but some don’t make any sense. Some are contradictory of one another, and some are just downright offensive.

- *What’s the problem with trusting in “signs”? Why does the Bible generally discourage looking to the world around us for supernatural confirmation? (e.g. Matthew 16:4, Mark 8:12)*

Isaiah’s message today came at a time when the people of Judah feared an impending conflict with the Syrians, along with the northern kingdom of Israel that sided with them. God’s message was that Judah need not fear: “It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass” (v. 7:7).

Strangely, in today’s lesson, King Ahaz is actually invited to ask for a sign by which God might prove the truth of his promise. When out of humility and fear, Ahaz said, “I will not put the Lord to the test” (v.12), God proceeded to offer his own sign. These words turn out to be a prophecy, not only of God’s deliverance in their present conflict, but also a prophecy of God’s final deliverance in the coming of Christ.

- *Why is it that, sometimes, when God gives us the promise of his protection and deliverance, we find it so hard to trust in God’s assurance? How does God’s Word help us in this regard?*
- *How does this lesson demonstrate God’s faithfulness to us, even when we cannot or will not believe it?*

Psalms 110:1–4

In this psalm we hear the promise of God to bless the kingly line of David. As Christians we hear it as the union of king and priest in the person of Jesus Christ. Not only is Jesus a descendant of King David, he is also David’s Lord.

If you are blessed to have grandchildren or even great-grandchildren that you get to see grow up and become the person God meant for them to be then you know how joyful it would have been for the descendants of David to have the Messiah among their kin.

- *Ponder the relationship between David and Jesus. Are both parties equally blessed? Why or why not?*
- *In biblical days, kings and priests were different individuals who served different functions. But Jesus was promised to be one who is both priest and king forever. What does this mean*

for how Jesus functions in our lives? What does this mean for the ways in which we can trust him?

1 John 4:7–16

“Love” is a word that gets tossed around fairly freely in our culture. “I love moose-tracks ice cream!” or “I love fill in the blank.” But not all “love” is the same. The love that is mentioned in this passage is not simply a *taste for*, or a *passing interest in*, the love that John speaks of is a self-giving, unconditional kind of love that was shown to us by Jesus on the cross. This is what is referred to in the Greek language as *agape* (a-GAH-pay), or “sacrificial love.” John asserts that without intimate knowledge of God and his *agape* love in our lives, we are unable to love similarly. To love sacrificially comes from knowing God himself.

It is important to understand this is a “Spirit-gifted” love, lest we assume that we can produce it on our own, by our own our free will and capabilities. Once the Holy Spirit gets hold of our hearts, love is produced within us by God himself. It is God alone who makes it happen with us.

- *Have you ever felt like you loved someone deeply and really had no concrete reason why? Could it have been God’s gift of agape love?*
- *How might God help us to love those that we otherwise deem “unlovable”? How does God’s love in us change the way we look at those who have been outcasts and strangers?*

Matthew 1:18–25

The promise presented to Joseph in a dream was that he would be the surrogate father of the one who would “save the people from their sins.” Not only was the news of Mary’s unplanned pregnancy a shock, but the angel confirmed to Joseph that his betrothed had indeed remained faithful, but that she now carried the Messiah of Israel in her womb. Talk about a hard concept to wrap one’s mind around!

- *Put yourself in Joseph’s shoes. What do you think you would have done in his place (and in his time)? How do you think God’s direct revelation would have impacted you?*

Joseph was truly a remarkable and holy man. His compassion for Mary was beyond what was expected of him. Clearly God chose the perfect man to support and care for Mary as the *theotokos* (God-bearer) and for the King of kings himself.

- *How does this story of Joseph, and his courage and faith, inspire your own desire to be faithful and courageous in the face of “impossible” circumstances?*