

The Sign

Matthew 1:18-25 & Isaiah 7:14

December 22, 2024

Please open your Bibles today to Matt 1. Everybody say sign. Signs are really great blessings. We have all kinds of signs up and down the road that tell us how far it is to the next exit as well as to distant cities. Billboards advertise restaurants like Cracker Barrel, Mickey Ds, and soon to be Buckies. We have signs that warn us various road hazards. Here are a couple signs you may not have seen. We could go on with these all day. There's a lot of crazy signs out there.

And throughout history God has given us many signs as well. The rainbow was His sign of promise that He would never destroy the earth again by water. The plagues in Egypt were signs of God's power and authority over all Creation. Circumcision, The Sabbath and the Passover were all signs that the Israelites were God's people. Whenever God did something great, He used a sign. But the sign we look at today was a sign marking the approaching fulfillment of God's greatest promise ever, to send a Messiah, a Savior for His people who would set all wrongs to right.

Please stand if you are able as we read about this sign from Matt 1:18 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. 19 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. 20 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. 21 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." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us." 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

This is Matthew's nativity story. While he doesn't include the details that Luke does, he does remind us that all this happened exactly according to what the prophets had foretold many years earlier. Matthew doesn't name the prophet he's referring to, but it is Isaiah who lived over 700 years before Jesus was ever born. I'd like to turn back to Isaiah this morning to see what he said there for what happened here in Matthew is the **sign** Isaiah promised God would post in the future. Isa 7:14 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.

We usually highlight the name Immanuel and rightfully so for it means what? Yes. God with us. But today we want to focus on that word sign. Say sign. The virgin's pregnancy and the birth of Immanuel were not just miracles, they were a sign. Signs point to something. Like we said earlier, to restaurants, to hospitals, to supermarkets. What was this virgin birth point to as a sign of?

This miracle was a sign of many things but let's begin by recognizing that Mary's virgin pregnancy was a sign of God's power. Say power. Humanly speaking, there is no way this could ever happen. It never happened before and it's never happened since. Mary herself was confounded when the angel told her she would have a baby. In Luke 1:34, she asked Gabriel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" She knew where babies came from and she knew she had never been intimate with a man. She knew this was an impossibility. And yet, Gabriel replies in Luke 1:37, "... nothing is impossible with God." There's a good verse to memorize, by the way. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a flashing neon sign of God's almighty power. Even today, many people reject the virgin birth. They push back insisting there is no way this could be possible. And it's not physically. But spiritually speaking, it's not only possible, God actually did it!

In order for Jesus to be sinless, uncontaminated by Adam's inherited sin, it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to cause Mary to conceive. If it's possible for Jesus to rise from the dead, do not be surprised at His ability to be born of a virgin. So this shall be a **sign** to you. This ought to get your attention! It ought to clue you in that God is on the move! The you in this passage is plural meaning it is a sign to all of us. It doesn't matter what language we speak, what color we skin is, or where we live. The birth of a child to a virgin is a sign that cannot and must not be missed.

This sign comes to us today that Jesus is Immanuel. That He isn't just another baby born in Adam's race. He is the unique holy one-of-a-kind, Son of the Almighty God! It's also a sign to us that nothing is impossible for God. Say Nothing. Nothing. There is no aspect of this universe God cannot alter to achieve His will. Nothing is out of His control. If God can bring a child from a virgin, He can heal any disease. He can change any situation. He can raise any dead man. If He can intervene and cause a virgin's womb to conceive, He can intervene in your circumstances. He can steer a storm, calm your tempest. He can alter whatever in nature needs to be altered to fulfill His holy and perfect purposes. In order to face the overwhelming problems we all encounter, we need a God like that, Amen? And praise Him, we have one! The virgin birth is a sign unto you of God's almighty power.

It is also a sign of hope. Say hope. When God enabled both elderly Sarah and Elizabeth to conceive, it inspired hope in others. But for a virgin to do so elevated hope to the highest level. It went from God being able to do the difficult to God being able to

do the impossible. So, what hopeless situation are you facing this Christmas? What desperate circumstance for which a miracle is the only solution? I know a guy! He's able to make virgins conceive! This shall be a sign unto all of you.

This is also a sign of God's Kingdom about to explode. Say Kingdom. Having been confined to the Jewish nation ever since Abraham, the Kingdom of God is about to exponentially increase as a result of this virgin's Boychild. The barren ground of the non-Jewish peoples of the world are about to hear the good news of a heretofore Jewish God that loves all people! Glimpses of this appeared in the past, with Jonah at Nineveh, with various prophecies, but as this virgin conceives, it will be a sign that God's kingdom is about to break out! And after Jesus was born, lived, died, and rose again, it did break out! On the Day of Pentecost, it exploded around the world and today it continues to advance into China, Africa, Russia, Iran, South America, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. But this virgin's pregnancy was the precursor, the indicator, the sign that all of this was about break loose. And praise God for it, because most, if not all of us in this room this morning are not Jewish and yet we too may participate and enjoy the privileges of being God's children in His Kingdom. This shall be a sign unto you!

Related to this, we see this as a sign that God's purposes and plans for this world will be fulfilled. In spite of the worldly powers that have tried to stand in His way, in spite of wicked rulers like Herod, Stalin, Hitler, and others who have tried to derail God's plans, the virgin's conception is an indication that they will all fail. God will ultimately triumph and His perfect will will be done on earth, even as it is in heaven. As much as Herod despised the thought of any other king, he was powerless to prevent Mary from conceiving one. And as much as worldly leaders, entertainers, influencers, and others want to frustrate and prevent God's purposes, Mary's pregnancy is a decisive sign that they can do nothing to stop the King of kings and Lord of lords. And He shall reign forever and ever. For this shall be a sign unto you!

It follows that if this is a sign of God's ability and power to achieve His purposes in spite of man's strongest attempts to prevent Him, it means this is a sign that all is well. And that all will be well. It's a sign that Romans 8:28 is not only possible, it's certain! That "we DO know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." And verse 29 follows close on its heels. "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." If you're a believer today, Jesus is your older brother. And God's plans will never be thwarted. For this shall be a sign unto you.

When Mary conceived Immanuel her country was under the cruel dictates of the Romans. You think the Democrats or Republicans are bad? The machinery of government was controlled by the hands of Emperors and kings who cared about little

more than themselves. There were few if any freedoms as we know them today. The economy was horrible. Every day it was hand to mouth. There was no middle class. There were a few at the very top and many at the very bottom, including a virgin named Mary. Sickness was common and the death rate was 100%, even as it is now. There were no hospitals, vaccines, or prescription medications. There were no nursing homes, social security, or food stamps. And besides all that, an arbitrary decree now required them to spend time and money to make a dangerous and difficult journey to Bethlehem just to be taxed some more. Sounds like the IRS, doesn't it? And God was able to work all of these bad things, all of these trials and challenges, all of these harsh realities, even evil, into something of eternal infinite good for all those who love Him and would be called according to His purpose. That's what this virgin's pregnancy is a sign of. All is well. Sleep easy for God is on His throne and evermore shall be, and no one or nothing on earth or in hell will ever push Him from it. We have a sign.

Our song of response today will be I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day written at the height of America's Civil War in 1863 by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow whose second wife had died two years earlier as a result of a tragic fire. His first wife had died at the age of 23 during a miscarriage. Trying to save his second wife from the fire, Henry was himself burned so badly that he was not even able to attend her funeral. He later feared he would be committed to a mental institution because of his great grief at her passing. In the midst of all this, his son Charles enlisted in the Union army against his father's wishes and was badly wounded at the Battle of Mine Run just over the mountain in Orange County at New Hope Church of all places. A few weeks later, on Christmas Day, 1863, with the war still raging and its outcome uncertain, Longfellow wrote the words to the carol recognizing the virgin's child was a sign that in spite of all else, all would be well.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day,
Their old, familiar carols play,
and wild and sweet, The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!
And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong, And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"
Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is **not dead**, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong **shall fail**, the Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

The virgin's child is a sign that God is not dead nor asleep. It's a sign that the wrong shall fail and the right will eternally prevail. It is a sign that one day there shall be peace on earth with good will toward all men.

This is also a sign of God's grace. Say grace. We don't deserve a Savior. We don't deserve to be saved. We don't deserve to be visited by our Creator whom we've rejected, insulted, and pushed away. We don't deserve to have Immanuel with us. We deserve to suffer in utter isolation from Him forever and ever in Hell. And yet, the virgin conceived and brought forth a Holy Son whose name is Immanuel. Behold this enormous billboard of God's great mercy and grace! He condescended, He came down to us even though He had every reason to abandon and leave us alone in our sin and misery. He did not. We have a sign.

Which can only mean one thing. God loves us. Say love. This Baby conceived in the womb of a virgin is a sign of many things, but none greater than God's great love for us. If He didn't love us, He wouldn't show us this grace and mercy. If he didn't love us, He wouldn't work all things together for good. If He didn't love us, Immanuel would never have come. For God so **loved** the world that He gave His only begotten Son. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Out of His abundance of love, God conceived Jesus within Mary.

People have tried to tear down this sign. They have attacked the virgin birth and tried to discount it and yet, it stands solid over 2000 years later. Luke, a physician, includes the record of the virgin birth. People want to deny it because they want to deny God's power. They want to deny Jesus' deity. They want to deny God's kingdom because they want to be their own king. And so they have attempted to tear down this sign, this marker that signals Jesus' mercy, grace, and love. But as long as time shall be, the lights of this miraculous sign will shine out brightly from under whatever lying blankets and tarps they try to throw overtop it. The virgin shall conceive, the virgin did conceive, and the virgin did give birth to the Savior of the world!

Which brings us to the last thing the virgin birth is a sign of. Say Salvation. The name Jesus means the Lord saves. Jesus came to save His people from their sins. He came to rescue us from the hopeless spiritual condition in which we were mired so deeply. I was privileged to hear Bro Michael Cooley's update on his latest African trip. The trip from the airport to the city in Sudan to which he was heading was only about 80 miles but it took them 12 hours. The road they took made the Woodstock Tower road look like a six lane interstate. He had a video of where four of their vehicles got stuck at the same time. In the dark. In the bush. No cell service. No nothing. Through a lot of ingenuity and repeated attempts, they were able to use the remaining vehicles to pull the stuck ones out and they continued on, eventually making it to their destination. That is a picture of you and I. Hopelessly stuck in our sin. Only with no earthly way out. No possible way. No amount of work or effort on our part, pushing, lifting, wishing or hoping will get us unstuck. And we will die there in sin's bush. But the virgin birth is a sign that a Savior was coming. Someone who would not only extricate us from the mud and quicksand of sin, but who has promised to transport us to glory. The virgin birth was a sign that help was on the way. Salvation

help. Forgiveness of sin help. Removal of our guilt and shame help. Restoration of our relationship with God that Adam broke help. And oneness with the Father. I like this sign! Don't you?

So I ask you today, have you seen this sign? Have you followed this sign? Have you recognized the uniqueness of the Baby Mary bore 2000 years ago in that Bethlehem cave? O come let us adore Him to whom the sign points. Adore and worship Him. And give your life to Him. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord. Behold the One, the miracle, the Messiah all signs points to. Receive the One who is the offspring of the virgin's womb while we pray today.