

# Fourth Sunday of Advent

## OVERCOMING FEAR

Isaiah 7:10-16

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Analysis by Bill White

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.

---

## DIAGNOSIS: FEAR LEADS TO DEATH

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Lives and Livelihoods Threatened from Foreign Powers*

King Ahaz is afraid, "in dread" of two other kings who are threatening him (v. 16). He is being pressured to join their Syria/Israel alliance in opposition to Assyria. What is he to do? On the one hand, he could give in to the pressure and join the alliance against mighty Assyria. On the other hand, he could resist their threat by reinforcing and enhancing Judah's vassal status with Assyria. With which side is King Ahaz to ally Judah? In the face of this threat which choice will insure his and

Judah's future?

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *The Real Threat Is Fear***

As monumental as this decision is, King Ahaz's problem is deeper and more consequential than deciding with whom to ally Judah. Into this situation comes the prophet Isaiah, sent by the Lord to speak to the King. Isaiah presents King Ahaz with a third option: remain neutral, do not fear these invaders, do nothing now EXCEPT to put your faith in the Lord and keep your faith in the Lord. After all, didn't God promise the great King David that one of his sons would always occupy the throne in Jerusalem (Isaiah 7:1-9)?

Isaiah's counsel reveals the deeper problem: Where is your faith King Ahaz? What is it, or who is it, you truly fear, love, and trust? Is your faith in a political, economic, and military alliance with Assyria? Is your faith in a political, economic, military alliance with Israel and Syria? Is your faith in Judah's own political, economic, and military resources? Or is your faith truly in the Lord your God, the God of your ancestor David?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Fear Leads to Idolatry, Idolatry Leads to Death***

Into this situation God through Isaiah offers King Ahaz a sign, a sign that this word is from the Lord and can be trusted (vv. 10-11). Seeking to avoid revealing his disbelief, King Ahaz responds with false piousness (v. 12). But God is not fooled and provides a sign anyway (vv. 13-16). This sign, however, is a sign of God's judgment on King Ahaz, and all persons and nations whose faith is in anything or anyone other than the one true God. Sadly, his actions will reveal what King Ahaz truly fears, loves, and trusts. He will not receive God's gift of faith to trump his fear; he will try to overcome fear with "faith" in the

false gods of this world. Faith in idols—the false gods of this world—leads to death and destruction.

## **PROGNOSIS: FAITH LEADS TO LIFE**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *God Conquers the Power of Fear through Christ*

Whether he wanted it or not, whether he liked it or not, God prophesied a sign to King Ahaz through Isaiah. “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” (v. 14). This sign from God is before us now having its most complete realization in the birth of Jesus to Mary. God has come to us and is with us in Jesus Christ. By his death on the cross and glorious resurrection Jesus is “God is with us” to accept God’s judgment on sin and save all who believe from sin, death, and the devil—including the sin of idolatry.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** : *Faith in Christ Trumps Our Fears*

The counsel of Isaiah to King Ahaz ultimately is God’s counsel to us all: In the face of fear, trust God! Isaiah wants us to know that the opposite of fear is not courage; the opposite of fear is faith. The crucified and risen Christ comes to us today by the power of the Holy Spirit offering the free gift of real faith, faith that overwhelms and crosses-out the power of fear. In the face of fear, receive and cling to the Lord’s gracious gift of faith in Christ, i.e. in the face of fear, “fear, love, and trust” God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** : *Lives and Livelihoods Secure in Christ*

This power of faith in Christ working within us does more than just overcome the power of fear within us (as wonderful as that is!). This faith is the very power of the Holy Spirit changing our hearts and minds in a way that changes our outward lives as

well. Now we are empowered to keep the faith even as our lives and our livelihoods are threatened by external forces. When the powers of this world confront us, when we find ourselves “in dread” of our enemies, Immanuel empowers us to keep the faith!