

A Strong Prediction

Building Core Strength

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Well, would you agree with me this morning that we all have many voices vying for our trust and for our allegiance, for our commitment. You think about it. We face that challenge in many ways practically every day. Who am I going to trust? Who am I going to believe? Who am I going to follow? We certainly had that going on in living Technicolor during the recent election cycle, literally billions of dollars, they say, spent trying to convince you and me of a candidate's believability. You can trust me that my position is best. And all that can be very confusing, can't it? Because you listen to one person and you say, "Well, that sounds right." And then you listen to the next person who says something different and you say, "Well, maybe that is right." It is hard to know who to believe. It is hard to know who to trust.

And then there is the media.

I had a conversation recently with a newspaper reporter who was explaining to me why I shouldn't really believe TV news. And that was fascinating, for sure, but it is all about believe me. And even if you get any of your news from television you have to decide, which one of the sources. Am I going to follow CNN? Am I going to follow Fox? Am I going to follow whoever? And they all say they are fair and balanced. They all regularly take swipes at one another. So you have to decide. Who am I going to believe?

Then there is entertainment. Whether you recognize it or not, all sorts of worldview choices and philosophies are played out in that TV program you really like to watch or that movie you saw or that book you read. What is right and wrong? What is true and false? What is beautiful? What is funny? What is acceptable? Because life does imitate art, at least in some sense. So if you allow that particular form of entertainment into your mind on any kind of regular basis, in one way or another, to some degree or another, you are trusting its message. You are granting those mentalities entrance into your heart.

And then there is the culture wars. I mean, you pick a fight and you have competing voices and you have to decide: Who am I believing on that one? Like here in our state. All sorts of fascinating voices right now in the field of education, especially after the recent election about our state's superintendent, even articles and commercials trying to influence you to think in a particular way. Or the fiscal cliff. Have you heard anything

about that recently? I thought so. And our president made it clear. He is taking that fight to the people. He is trying to convince voters that he is right so you will put pressure back on your elected officials. So what do you believe about whether taxes ought to be raised or not, or whether our nations' budget deficit is a good thing or a bad thing and whether or not we ought to be concerned about the national debt? I mean, you have got all these different opinions. Who do you trust? A lot of options.

Now especially this time of year we can add this. The supposed joy options. All the things that could possibly bring you joy like retailers are making promises to you. They are spending massive amounts of their money in order to get you to spend massive amounts of yours, right? Why? Well, they are making a promise. Trust me. If you buy this, you will have joy.

Have you ever seen an advertisement with a person standing there with a product in his hand with a frown on his face along with the credit card bill that he just received having had purchased something that he couldn't afford the month before? Of course not. You don't see people frowning. Everybody is happy in those ads. They are wearing designer clothes and living in a mansion and surrounded by beautiful friends. Or maybe just one romantic looking model who is about to smooch your face off because you bought that huge piece of jewelry you will never pay off in this life.

But the promise is: Trust me, trust me, buy that and you are going to find joy. Or this one. You will have joy if you achieve the particular body size that everybody wants. And so we will ship you your food for five times what it would cost you to buy fresh down at the Walmart and you won't even have to exercise. You will take this pill along with it and the pounds will literally melt away. Occasionally you will have to sweep them up because they keep falling off of you as you walk from the couch to the pantry for some more chips, but other than that... Trust me, trust me. You will have joy. You will be the perfect body size or the perfect holiday table. See, you have to have it all designed just right. Here is where joy is. You make this recipe. And then your children will whisk down the stairs in their holiday best and your in-laws will come in with the warm flask of wassail and you will go caroling in the snow in your horse drawn sleigh. And everybody is going to be happy. See, just trust us. Trust us. Do this and you will have joy.

I mean, we could talk about options like that all day long. Buy me. Trust me. Believe in me.

Well, one more source, one that is quite sinister, frankly, whispering in your ear all day long is sometimes ideas that are complete lies, suggesting absolutely outrageous ideas past that if you took them would lead to ruin and heartache, yet saying, "Trust me. I know what is right. I know what is best." Do you know who that person is? Well, that would be you.

Do you realize many times when the Bible uses the word deceive the next word in the sentence is yourself? Yeah, himself, like this passage, 1 Corinthians 3:18.

“Let no man deceive himself.”¹

So it is not just don't always trust the politicians or don't always trust the media members or don't always trust the entertainers or the culture warriors or the advertisers. It is even a matter of don't always trust you. You.

Well, that leaves us in a rather interesting predicament, doesn't it? Who are you going to trust? Who are you going to believe? Who are you going to follow?

Well, something that can help us answer that question is one of the details of Christmas. That is right, one of the details of Christmas.

With that in mind, open your Bible, if you would, to Isaiah chapter seven. If you don't have a Bible with you or you would never find Isaiah seven, just pull out that one from under the chair in front of you and turn to the front section, the Old Testament to page 491. And that will bring you to Isaiah chapter seven. And we are going to work in that passage this morning and I do mean work. You came to work, right? Yeah, I got like one... that is good enough for me.

Our theme all year long has been building core strength. And we have been emphasizing that in verses like Psalm 138:3.

“On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul.”²

You have been on that this year. I hope so. I hope you can point to specific ways that God has helped you become stronger this year. That is what this has all been about. And now during Christmas time where we are building on that theme by thinking about that issue of quiet strength. The birth of Jesus was anything but flash or loud or flamboyant on purpose. In many ways it was a silent night. It was a holy night. That is why so many of the beautiful people in the world all but missed it. There is no question about the fact that it was simultaneously characterized by great strength. But it was quiet strength.

And this morning we want to study a prophecy. Yeah, really, a prophesy in the Old Testament about the virgin birth and see how the message of Christmas includes a strong prediction. If anybody is able to make a prediction like this 700 years in advance and then actually pull it off, that person is worthy of your trust. There is no politician will like ever do that. No media member, nobody, not even you will ever do that. If a person like this can make a promise like this and keep it, you really ought to trust him.

Now here is the deal. Are you ready for a deal? I will make you a deal. Next Sunday we are going to have our Christmas musical right here in this very room and we are going to relax. We are going to enjoy ourselves. It is going to be great, huh? This Sunday is different, because this Sunday we are going to work. Are you ready to work in the Word of God? Are you ready to study hard? And we are going not balance that all out and it

¹ 1 Corinthians 3:18.

² Psalm 138:3.

will be great, topped off with a cup of wassail, whatever that is. But right now Isaiah chapter seven, dig in, verse one.

“Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it.”³

You say, “I am already lost.”

Here is what that just told you. Ahaz, the king of Judah, has two other guys coming and trying to conquer him. That is what that is. I will explain more in a moment. Just stay with me. Now in verse two.

When it was reported to the house of David, saying, "The Arameans have camped in Ephraim," his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind. Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field, and say to him, 'Take care and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. 'Because Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, "Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it," thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass. "For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin (now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, so that it is no longer a people), and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.'""

Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well?"⁴

Now if you are totally lost, lock on to verse 14.

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and

³ Isaiah 7:1.

⁴ Isaiah 7:2-13.

choose good. For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.⁵

We are talking this morning about a strong prediction. And a little later we are going to bring in a couple of other passages from the New Testament to see how this was fulfilled and we are going to do that on the PowerPoint screen just for sake of time. But when we get all that done, I really believe we can find three principles to help us place our faith where it truly belongs. So we are going to be the kind of people who walk through Christmas season believing the right voices and ignoring the rest.

Here is where it starts. Friends, God frequently offers promises to those who are struggling to trust him. And I realize you might have gotten lost in all those names and all those places, but, believe me, you are in these verses. And so am I. And what I mean by that is the essential issue facing King Ahaz is one that you and I face all the time as well. Who are you going to trust? So let's wring these verses out as carefully as we can and learn all we can.

And we are introduced to this wayward king. His name is Ahaz. And just to cut to the chase, the Scripture summarizes his life in some not very flattering ways, like in 2 Chronicles 28.

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do right in the sight of the LORD as David his father had done. But he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; he also made molten images for the Baals.⁶

So we know that this guy, this man, the promise is being made to, is clearly a very wicked man.

Now I realize some might say, "See, Ethel, I know I shouldn't have agreed to come to church, because already he is talking about people and things I don't understand."

Well, hold on, Harold, because you can get this and you need to get this. In fact, I just had a friend, my long time friend, at my kitchen table the other day who said, "You know, I just feel like I am a little baby when I hear something from the Bible, because I don't know the Bible very well. I have not spent any time in my life really to understand the Word of God and so I feel like just a child whenever I get around it." Listen, that is ok. You hear that? We all start somewhere. So if you feel like right now, like, you know, I am 50, I am 60, whatever, and I don't know the Bible very well. That doesn't matter. We all start somewhere. But if this book is as reliable as we are saying it is, you need to start learning it. It doesn't matter how old you are. You need to get on it now. You got that?

⁵ Isaiah 7:14-16.

⁶ 2 Chronicles 28:1-2.

That would have been a good time for yes, pastor Viars, and thank you, because I know you are right about that and I am going to.

Thank you very much. And then correspondingly you would have said, "Could you suggest some tools that would help me, that maybe some loved ones could buy me for Christmas to help me study the Bible more in the new year?" That is what you were thinking, weren't you? I can read your mind. I am a trained counselor. So, good. There you go. Here is the first one.

I really want to encourage you to get a study Bible. If you don't have one, get one, because, as you were reading in Isaiah seen it actually would have some explanation like who as Ahaz, boom, you got it. Who was Pekah, boom, you got it. Who was Resin, boom, you got it.

By the way, some of you are expecting kids. You don't even have to worry about what am I going to name my child? You have got plenty of choices right here in this text, right? But I want to encourage you to get a MacArthur study Bible.

Now some of you might say, "I am not even sure I believe the Bible yet."

Fine. I want to encourage you to get this one. It is just a small little book entitled *God Wrote a Book* by my friend James Mc Donald. That will really help you understand where the Bible even came from. You need to know that information. Word. I am telling you.

And then lastly, this, *30 Days to Understanding the Bible in 15 Minutes a Day* by Max Anders. That is a great book. And if you have not read it, I really want to encourage you to get those sources and to plan to study them.

Here is the thing. God's people are thinkers. God's people are students. We want to understand the Word well. And so even if you are just getting started, fine. But let's get on the idea of getting to a better place.

Now you have to locate what we are talking about in Isaiah seven historically. You like history, don't you? Good. You don't have to worry about all kinds of dates, but let me give you for dates. If you are going to understand your Bible, especially in the Old Testament, you need these four dates. Are you ready? Ok, here is the first one. It is 2160 which was the call of Abraham. That is when all of this started, essentially, in Genesis 12 when God made a promise through the great patriarch Abraham that was 2160 BC.

Now you have probably heard of a guy named Moses. You have heard of him, right? The crossing of the Red Sea. When did that take place? Before or after Abraham? After would be a good answer, a long time after, 700 years later. 1440 BC was the life Moses. Now I am skipping a lot, but there was after Moses the period of judges, the period of the prophets and then the nation demanded a king. And so God gave them a series of kings.

One of them was especially famous. He actually came up in this text, one of Israel's greatest kings. He was a shepherd boy. What was his name?

Yeah, King David. That was about 1000 BC. You really need to know that just to kind of peg this historically. Here is the skeleton.

Now one more date you need to know for our purposes this morning and for any time you are going to study the Old Testament. It is a really sad event that happened not long after the reign of David and Solomon. It is when the nation divided where the southern tribes were known as Judah. You saw that in this text, Judah. They kept their capital in Jerusalem. The northern tribes were called Israel and they set up a rival capital and a rival system of worship in Samaria, which is why even in the time of Christ who was it that the orthodox did not like? The Samaritans. That came back to this particular date.

So what I have said—I realize your head might be spinning right now—what I said is that much of the Old Testament is played out in that context of the sad truth that God's nation is actually divide between the southern kingdom Judah and the northern kingdoms of Israel.

Now, here is what you need to know for today. Isaiah seven, what I just read to you, that occurred in 735 BC. So now the nations have been divided for a couple of hundred years and now Isaiah the prophet is ministering especially to Judah. That is what is in blue, not the Mediterranean Sea, the nations that are in blue up on that map. So Isaiah is especially ministering to him and the King of Judah. If you have been paying attention at all, the King of Judah was Ahaz. He is our guy that this promise was made to.

Now, something else you need to know. The dominant secular power at this time was Assyria and they were evil. They were brutal. They were powerful. And Assyria has already been coming into the northern kingdom of Israel. And they are trying to dominate it. That is why we have what we have in this text, because you have the king of the northern tribes making a treaty with Damascus, Aram, and then coming down to the southern tribes and trying to convince Ahaz to join us. Join us. Trust us. Everything is going to be fine. That was the frightening situation we just read about. That was the point.

When it was reported to Ahaz saying:

“‘The Arameans have camped in Ephraim,’ his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind.”⁷

Now, you say, “I didn't get any of that.”

Well, ok. Fine. Get this. King Ahaz had a crucial decision to make at this point in history. Who is he going to trust? And he had three essential options. He could have trusted his estranged brothers to the north and made the treaty that they were asking him to make.

⁷ Isaiah 7:2.

Or he could have aligned himself with this evil nation of Assyria. Or he could have believed in the words of his God. And guess what? Ahaz, our man, is actually in the process of making an alliance with Assyria, the worst of the three options. In fact, by the time this story is over, he is actually going to be taking gold out of the temple and sending it up to Assyria to try to buy their friendship. And that is when God sent Isaiah to tell Ahaz, “Under no circumstances should you trust in Assyria, because even if it appears that you can find safety and security there, that nation will eventually eat you alive. You will be trusting the wrong thing.

It is the same choice as the psalmist would later articulate. Some trust in chariots and some trust in horses. We are going to trust in the name of the Lord our God.

Now please go back to what we said at the beginning. We are faced with that {?} all the time. Who are you going to trust? Who are you going to follow? Who are you going to believe?

What it would like you to especially see at this point in the discussion is this. God in his infinite mercy and grace does things. He makes promises and he keeps them to make the choice of following him as easy as possible for people like you and me. That is why he instructs Isaiah to give Ahaz an offer. Then the Lord spoke to this king, to the King of Judah, the man we are talking about saying:

“Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven.”⁸

In other words, Ahaz, if you are having trouble believing in me I want to make this as easy for you to trust me as possible. Ask me for a sign.

Now Ahaz had already made up his mind. So he gives this answer dripping with false piety.

“Well, I don’t want to trust God or I don’t want to test God,” as if his entire lifestyle and reign hadn’t been one gigantic test of God’s patience already.

And God says, in essence, “Fine. I am going to give you a sign anyway. And even if this sign isn’t enough to pierce your unbelief, Ahaz, at this particular point in history, surely it can help others bolster their faith in the days ahead.”

And Isaiah then said:

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child.”⁹

Say what? Are you so used to the Word of God that that doesn't shock the... that doesn't go together very well. Virgin, child. What? The promise is:

⁸ Isaiah 7:11.

⁹ Isaiah 7:14.

“...a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”¹⁰

God with us. See, Ahaz, I am making it easy for you and for generations to come to follow me because there will be a virgin conception and one of the child's names will be Immanuel which means God is with us which ought to make it easier for you not to trust in chariots and horses because if I can make this promise and keep it, you ought to be the kind of person in Christmas time and every other time who trusts in the name of the Lord our God.

Now, look. We are in a university town. You may have had some people that you have talked to about the virgin birth and they gave you some push back, but I am all about questions and I am all about push back. And if we are going over to the west side of town, we had better be ready for some additional push back, bring it on, bring it on. So I realize that some people who would say, “Well, how would that have been an encouragement to Ahaz? It didn't happen for 700 years.”

And we don't know the answer to that. That is a good question and the Bible is silent on that point. Sometimes in Scripture there is a double fulfillment where in that particular historical context there is some aspect of a promise that is fulfilled and then it is completely fulfilled later. We don't know for sure, because the Scripture is silent on that point. But there may be some sense in which Isaiah's son was conceived in a miraculous way. We do not know that for sure.

There is also people who say—maybe you have heard this—“Well, but the Hebrew word in Isaiah 14 translated virgin in our English Bibles could also be translated young woman. So it really wasn't a virgin birth. So you need to get off the virgin birth thing,” to which we would say back, “Well, then, where is the sign in that?” A young woman is going to conceive and have a child. That like happens every day. Come to this church. It happens like every day. I mean, just go and look at the nursery. I am not exactly sure what is happening. We are testing and we are going to get back with you, but I mean, it happens that... So if that is a sign, we have got that sign like going on all over the place.

But more seriously is this. We have a book that really helps us not hat point and it is the Septuagint. You are {?} the Septuagint, aren't you? You know what the Septuagint is? The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Why is that important? Because it was done about 200 BC. Obviously at that time the Jewish nation had fallen just like God said it would in this text. And, as a result of the rise of the Roman Empire and the spread of the Greek language, the Jewish people wanted their Bibles translated in a language they could understand and that became the Septuagint which is really important because we have an understanding of how people were interpreting their Bibles during the time of Christ. And the Greek word that was chosen to translate virgin in Isaiah 7:14 is the Greek word παρθενοϋς (par-then'-os) which is a very precise word in Greek. It cannot mean simply young woman. There is no question that the translators of

¹⁰ Ibid.

the Septuagint clearly expected a Messiah who would be born of a virgin. That is the only thing that that word can translated.

And one of the signs would be that he would be born of a virgin and be God himself, Immanuel. And if the Lord had the strength to pull that promise off 700 years later, that is a God worthy of your trust.

Name the advertiser who can do that. Name the weight loss program that can promise that. And name the politician that can do that. Think about all the people vying for your trust. That book you hold in your hand and the God who wrote it is worthy of you following him.

Now let's fast forward to the New Testament where we learn that every day people can choose to trust the promises of God. You might say, "Well, I am not a king."

Good, because the king messed it up. The king eventually did trust in Assyria and his nation was conquered.

When you turn to the New Testament you learn every day people heard that promise, too. And some believed it like Mary. You realize the same promise was made to Mary. Now what do we know about Mary? Well, we know she was poor. But how do we know that Mary was poor? Because after Jesus was born and she and Joseph made the offering in the temple, it was a tiny offering that was a provision in the Old Testament for people who were poor. And what was emphasized when the angel came to Mary? It was this. Even though mighty King Ahaz wouldn't be swayed by the promise, poor young Mary was.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.¹¹

There is no question about the fact that without apology the New Testament is saying God can keep his Word. And if you know anything about your Bible, if you knew what we have just been talking about regarding the context of Isaiah 7:14, and then, for the first time you would read Luke 1:26, your jaw would drop. She is a virgin. Isaiah 7:14 is about to come to pass. You got that right.

And the angels said:

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

¹¹ Luke 1:26-27.

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"¹²

I want to believe you. I want to trust you. I want to follow you, but how can that be? And there is this honest, authentic conversation that was just delightful. And the angel explains:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."¹³

Now here is how Ahaz and Mary were different. And here is how I hope you are going to decide to march out of this auditorium saying, "I am going to be unlike Ahaz. I am going to be like Mary," because she possessed courageous faith, quiet strength.

Mary said, remember this?

"Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word."¹⁴

Friends, that is strength. That is quiet strength at the first Christmas. The God who is strong enough to make a promise like that and keep it and a young woman strong enough to believe it. And because of that the Bible tells us that Mary was a marvelous blessing, just like you will be if you choose to follow the promises of God during Christmas and ignore some of these competing voices that are trying to make you crazy. You will, in turn, be a blessing to those the Lord has placed around you.

You say, "Why do you say Mary was a blessing?"

It goes all the way back to the very beginning. When God called Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 verse three, here is what he said. "Abraham, in you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

How is that going to be? That through the nation of Israel all other nations shall be blessed, because through the nation of Israel the Messiah would come.

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus."¹⁵

Savior, the one who will save the people from their sins. That is why—stay with me—that is why the virgin birth is so important, because the normal process of procreation had to be interrupted and so that Jesus could be born without a sin nature and as Immanuel, as the Son of God, he could some day go to the cross and pay the penalty for our sin as the unblemished perfect Lamb of God, because he was born of a virgin just as Isaiah had promised.

¹² Luke 1:31-34.

¹³ Luke 1:35.

¹⁴ Luke 1:38.

¹⁵ Luke 1:31.

And here is the point. If a poor, teenage girl could take God at his Word, so can you and I. And we are going to have opportunities all through this Christmas season to decide. Am I going to believe the promises of God? Am I going to trust him and take him at his Word or am I going to follow all these competing voices that are going to take me all over the place and make me and everybody else around me crazy?

In fact, something I would encourage you to do now between and Christmas. Get out your concordance. Get in a quiet place and just study what the Bible says about trusting him. The word trust, fascinating in Scripture. Here is just a few of them.

Psalm 28:7.

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him.”¹⁶

See, he decided who he was going not believe.

“...and I am helped; Therefore my heart exults, And with my song I shall thank Him.”¹⁷

Or Psalm 56:3.

“When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust.”¹⁸

Is that you? Can you say with him this morning:

“I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?”¹⁹

I have already decided who I am going to follow.

Or Psalm 62:8.

“Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.”²⁰

Or this great one from the same man we have been studying this morning.

““The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace.”²¹

Could we use that around the holidays?

¹⁶ Psalm 28:7.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Psalm 56:3-4.

¹⁹ Psalm 56:4.

²⁰ Psalm 62:8.

²¹ Isaiah 26:3.

“...because he trusts in you. "Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.”²²

I am saying God demonstrated his strength by making an unbelievable but extremely necessary promise. And then when the time was right he brought it to pass. And Mary, unlike Ahaz in her quiet, sweet, yet courageous way, showed the strength of her faith by trust in the sign God had given.

Now we are not looking for signs today, ok? That is not the take away of this message. We have the completed Word of God. But I want to encourage you to think about what following this message could look like specifically in the coming days for you, like when that advertisement tempts you to find joy by spending more than you can afford in order to gain the approval of others. Don't believe it. Don't trust it. Don't follow it. Instead, remind yourself that joy comes from what God has already given in his Son. Joy comes from being a wise steward of what he has entrusted to you. And anybody in your life who really mattered would rather you were a good steward of your money than buying them things that you can't afford and having to face the lack of peace in the new year.

Decide who you are going to trust. Or when that commercial comes on with the super model who tells you that you can be thin as a rail if you just buy her product. And then your life is going to be so perfect, because you are going to look so good. Tell her to go eat a Twinkie. I mean just say that right in the TV, ok? And she will probably go nuts because she won't be able to find one.

Then tell her that the most important thing about you is not how you look on the outside. It is the dynamic nature of your relationship with the one who saved you from your sin and has drawn you closer to him even if you are not the perfect size. And you are not going to get all wound up about that.

Or when you are running around like a nutcase trying to decorate the perfect tree or make the perfect appetizers believing that voice in your head that is telling you those are the things that are most important. Just stop believing those lies.

The average family would prefer to have a mom who is relaxed and rejoicing in Christ with some stuff purchased down at the Meyer bakery than to someone who is mad and anxious and all stressed out with the latest and greatest from pinterst.

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”²³

By the way, one more person in this story. You could call him the anti Ahaz. His life proves that God is honored by people who choose to trust in him. Of course, now I am talking about Joseph.

²² Isaiah 26:3-4.

²³ Isaiah 26:3.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet...²⁴

From Isaiah seven. No advertiser can make that claim. No politician can make that claim. And, as much as I love you, you can't make that claim. It is the book you have in your hand, the one that I am encouraging you as your pastor to get to know really, really well. And what did Joseph do with that?

And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.²⁵

Friend, I would ask you this morning: What is God encouraging you to trust? What is God encouraging you to believe and follow in his Word and are you willing to do it?

You might be here. We have got so many new folks coming to our church it is delightful. But I wonder how many might be coming and you have heard the gospel, but you have not yet trusted it. You have not made a decision to become a follower of Christ yet. Here is the promise.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."²⁶

And, friend, if you have not believed that yet, I love you. You are like Ahaz. I want to encourage you to be like Mary and Joseph. Choose to believe.

I know we have a number of people in our church who are serving God as if you believe his Word. It has been a great weekend. Between all those serving in the living nativity, all those serving in Christmas for everyone yesterday, people serving, getting ready for the musical. Why would people do that? It is because they have decided that they are going to order their life around the promises of their God.

My guess is in the coming weeks you are going to have a lot of voices going on, a lot of people clamoring for your attention. I hope you will decide that we are not going to trust

²⁴ Matthew 1:18-22.

²⁵ Matthew 1:24-25.

²⁶ John 3:16.

in chariots, horses, advertisers or politicians, not ultimately. We are going to trust in the name of the Lord our God.