

ADVENT OF CHRISTMAS - THE IMMORTAL SIGN

Isaiah 7:14

*“Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign:
The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,
And will call Him - Immanuel.”*

Synopsis of Message

We are preparing for an unprecedented Christmas. We need an unparalleled intervention beyond human comprehension. All of humanity is adversely affected. More than a million lives have died and still counting. Not a single sector of life and livelihood is left untouched. The irony is that the ‘killer’ is a least expected invisible tiny cell-like droplet that travel through the nasal channel and into the massive pipes of the human blood stream, creating havoc and tragedy along the way.

World governments have been found wanting with immediate effective response. The boast of our advanced scientific and technological inventions in this highly digitised world could not find an effective answer for the past nine months. Religious leaders are not spared from being bombarded with questions of fear and faith. Against this horrendous backdrop, we enter into the month of December to usher in the Advent of Christmas. Where is Immanuel - God with us? Does He know? Does He care. Is He still here?

Yes, yes, yes!!! He is still here. There is still hope. The prophecy of Isaiah 7 leads us to the Immortal Sign of the First Advent with real and relevant life applications for them then, for us now and for the future to come leading to His imminent Second Advent. Arise, all you saints and proclaim the message of Love, Hope, Peace and Joy to a world cowed and confined within the four walls of their home. Inform them to go online for the service and receive the Immortal Message of Christmas. Will you?

Outline of Message

Introduction - Is there a Way Forward? (Isaiah 7:1-14)

Steadiness - Hold on Firmly Despite Overwhelming Threats

Optimism - Trust Unreservedly in His Unconditional Promise

Niftiness - Steer Resolutely towards the Immortal Sign

Conclusion - Receive His Salvation
Respond with Optimism
Restart a New Chapter

Immanuel, the SON is still HERE!

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INTRODUCTION

Hi Brothers and Sisters in the Lord and friends. Hope everything is well with you, even your health. Let me go straight into my message. Have you ever been caught in a tight spot where circumstances left you hemmed in, pinned down and at the mercy of forces beyond your control? Maybe you are tight financially, or struggle with your job or studies or in a dilemma involving relationships. Worse of all, maybe you are involved in all of them as many are struggling in the current Covid19 pandemic. What do you do? How do you find a way of escape? Where is God? Does He know? Did He allow it? In such a time and season as this, where is Immanuel - God with us?

These are real questions we are grappling with, in these uncertain times. Many people are separated from their loved ones for months due to travel restrictions. “Lockdown” and “Social Distancing”, terms which we have never heard off up till the beginning of this decade, have caused the world to standstill, economies on the verge of collapse, healthcare stretches to the brim, big and small companies going bust, thousands, if not millions, of jobs being displaced, social institutions in quandary, church services force to go online, families in undue stress, individuals disorientated, and the list goes on. What is left to hold firm and hold on to?

In an unprecedented moment like this, we need an unparalleled intervention beyond human comprehension. Many have given generous adoration to the great human inventions such as the Wright Brothers’ prototype airplane or the computer and the internet. I would say to you that the greatest wonder in all of human history, put together, is the quiet virgin birth, in an obscure runt in the litter manger beside an unknown cave village called Bethlehem Ephrathah. It was the birthplace of Immanuel - God with us. It was where we remembered the setting surrounding the near impossible birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

BIBLE PASSAGE - ISAIAH 7:1-14

Hi there, that was only my introduction. My message today is entitled - The Advent of Christmas, focusing on the Immortal Sign. To begin, let me read Isaiah 7:14; **“Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: the virgin**

will conceive and give birth to a son. And will call Him - Immanuel.” A blessed, peaceful and joyous verse indeed. However, glossing over the circumstances surrounding and leading to the prophecy robs us of immeasurably rich and relevant life lessons; which is the focus of my message, comprising 3 thoughts, for us to hold on firmly, trust unreservedly and steer resolutely towards the Lord as we prepare for Christmas in a pandemic world.

STEADINESS - HOLDING ON FIRMLY DESPITE OVERWHELMING THREATS

3 key words to remember. Firstly, steadiness - hold on firmly despite overwhelming threats. **Isaiah 7:14 was a sign of extraordinary encouragement despite exterminating threats.** The Northern Kingdom of Israel led by, **“⁵Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah’s son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶‘Let us invade Judah (the Southern Kingdom); let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it’.”** (Isaiah 7:5-6) While the threat was real as the alliances of the North had entered the Southern Kingdom and were marching into Jerusalem, God gave an astute response for the Prophet to calm the terrified and shaken King Ahaz;

“Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smouldering stubs of firewood’.” (Isaiah 7:4)

Aram and Ephraim were spent forces. They were smouldering stubs which would be extinguished soon. Smouldering means smoking wood, but no fire. Stub is the remains of a cigarette or wood after burning. In common English the Lord is saying, “Do not be afraid of these enemies. They look full of fire, but they are tails of stubs. There is no fire in them. Similarly, the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, uttered some 700 years before its fulfilment provided the calm that the divided Jews needed under the imposing and cruel rule of the Roman Empire in the New Testament. Fast forward, 2000 years later, today Isaiah 7:14 is still the same message of calm to all of us living through Covid19.

In all these years, we have placed inordinate trust in our resources, wealth and abundance. Others, form misguided alliances with business partners, churches and relationships assure themselves of safety and security. Covid19, not even the worse to come, has shaken our foundations of misplaced trust. Money can pay for medicine and healthcare, but it cannot prevent death through infection. Liaisons are no match to a tiny, invisible and deadly virus which breaks up seemingly solid alliances and wipes away billions from accounts. Christians cannot take refuge in the church anymore because the institution itself is subjected to the same threat.

Isaiah 7:14 takes on a more personal and intimate meaning like never before. The Advent of Christmas is not meant to be an annual church focused

event and celebration. Definitely, Christmas is not a secular merrymaking and money-churning enterprise. The true meaning of the Advent of Christmas is, first and foremost, a personal faith in the untainted virgin-born Son; welcoming Him into our life and family, as the eternal Saviour and Lord. The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 and its literal fulfilment in Matthew 1:23 build solid and steady faith in the hearts of those who hold on to Him firmly. Immanuel - God with us - brings untold calm despite overwhelming uncertainties. Amen!

Illustration: (Magic Trick #A - Eat Oreo) - I have experienced His calm during this period of uncertainty. In March, the Lord assured me of His provision by giving me a word, “Selah” (pronounced as Say-Lah). It means, pause or rest calmly. Selah, has its origin depicting a person worshipping and meditating peacefully on a solid rock. It was a comforting Word to me because my savings since Feb was depleting by the week as all my engagements were cancelled till the rest of this year at least. Selah gave me divine strength not to succumb to the many temptations for self and family survival. In all these months, I held on to Him firmly. I will tell you a bit more later.

OPTIMISM - TRUST UNRESERVEDLY IN HIS UNCONDITIONAL PROMISE

Moving on, the second key word - Optimism - Trust unreservedly in His unconditional Promise. **Isaiah 7:14 was a sign of sovereign promise over secular power.** The formidable Assyrian Empire gave invincible support to the Northern Kingdom in its pursuit of the smaller and weakened Southern brethren. But the Sovereign God promised the sinful King Ahaz in Isaiah 7:7, **“It will not take place; it will not happen.”** Judah would prevail, regardless! How about the King? “Would Ahaz prevail?” This pandemic confronts us with a similar challenge. The world will ride over the pandemic sooner or later. The real question is - “Will you emerge better or worse?”

In Isaiah 7:9; God was explicit with King Ahaz; **“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”** What Ahaz believed will not affect the outcome of the war. But, it will affect his life and destiny. The real issue of Isaiah 7 is not about political fights. It is about personal faith. If Ahaz could trust unreservedly in God’s sovereign promise, he will prevail and emerge better. Otherwise, his reign will end and his life will be ruined. Similarly, if we do not stand firm in our faith, we do not deserve to stand before God. The choice of Covid19 is not about forging alliances or self-preservation, but about faithful allegiance to the Sovereign’s Providence.

When we are confronted with an unprecedented generational pandemic, the first instinct is survival. It is normal to ensure that the job is secured, the budget is balanced, the family is intact and the health of everyone is safe. But, to restrict ourselves solely to the realm of the natural is to deny room for the release of the supernatural. Unlike Gideon the Judge, Ahaz rejected

God's offer of a sign to test His promise, because of his unbelief. Gideon, on the other hand, tested God with signs, not because of unbelief. Rather, he wanted to be triply certain that the Sovereign God walked before him. Such contrasting convictions, resulted in equally contrasting destinies.

Isaiah 7:14 takes on a more spiritual and relational meaning like never before. In a modern and advanced technologically digitised and robotic world, we are less attuned to the supernatural and the miraculous. Our beliefs lean more to the scientific and empirical evidences than faith and trust in a dynamic spiritual relationship with the Almighty. 'God with us' is not a limited edition confined to 25th of December. Immanuel is a daily self-checker from 1st January to 31st December, encompassing every moment of every hour of every day of our lives. It is this optimism that gives rise to genuine faith, hope, peace and joy to the whole world despite the prolonged stress.

NIPTINESS - STEER RESOLUTELY TOWARDS THE IMMORTAL SIGN

The third and final key word is Niftiness - Steer resolutely towards the immortal sign. **Isaiah 7:14 was a sign of spiritual resolve in a world of stubborn rejection.** The merciful God offered the idolatrous King Ahaz an opportunity for redemption. Instead, he rejected God outright. (Isaiah 7:10-12) It prompted Isaiah to rebuke the ungrateful and unbelieving king in Isaiah 7:13 **"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?"** Isaiah reproved the king for not only wearying his subjects, but also wearing out the patience of God. Do not test God with unbelief and exhaust His grace and mercy!

Signs direct the wise and discerning to something miraculous to come. It is a light that illuminates the path ahead; a means to an end. The real intent is what happens thereafter. It leaves the viewers in awe and propel them to take further action. Isaiah 7:14 says, **"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel."** The Advent of Christmas is a sign that points to something more significant thereafter - the life and works of the Son, Jesus Christ. Immanuel is about Christ, which means the Anointed Messiah Who embodies the Message that Yahweh Saves (which is the meaning of Jesus).

Therefore, it is unforgivable for King Ahaz to belittle the sign, foolishly rejected it and unwittingly led a kingdom in tatters. It is not an over-reaction of the prophet to dismiss the king. It is equally unwise for anyone today, to diminish Christmas to a 'be-all' and 'end-all' 24-hour celebration, once a year. The world outrightly rejects the significant sign of the virgin birth. The church must painstakingly redirect it back to the true intent of Isaiah 7 and Matthew 1; pointing the world back to the virgin birth, the life and works of

the Son of God and the provision of eternal life for all. Covid19 reduces everything to just one word - LIFE! When you lose it, you lose everything!!

Christmas is indeed, a sign that points to the way of salvation and eternal life in Jesus Christ. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man can come to God the Father, except through the Son (John 14:6) If we have not been faithful in pointing people to Jesus, may this message propel us to steer resolutely to lead people to experience the true outcome of the Advent of Christmas, not just during this month, but from here on, be proactive in turning sinners into saints. If you have yet to experience the love of God and the salvation of God through Jesus Christ, you can do so at the end of this message when the offer of prayer is extended.

Illustration: (\$USD trick) - I mentioned earlier my savings were depleting quickly. Yet, God said, Selah. Rest and trust in Him. This year alone, in March a M'sian church transferred a \$1000 SG into my account. Since then, it has continued to do so every alternate month. On 2 other occasions a church in SG transferred \$300 each time into my account. They have never done that before, except for the honorarium I received from preaching. In addition, I have learned new skills and upgraded some older ones. While the bank account is still depleting I seek out those who do not have and share what I do not have enough with them. Selah, Immanuel - God with us. Rest in Him.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the sign of the Advent of Christmas has practical implications to our lives today as we prepare for His Second Coming. **It is a call to remain steady and hold firmly onto His promise.** Let us not be faint hearted when circumstances, stress and distress us. Let us not be fearful when our lives and livelihood are severely dented at the moment. Unlike the First Advent, the Bible tells us that the worst is yet to be prior to His Second Coming. Like those who steadily waited for His First Coming, we too must hold firmly to the Lord as we wait patiently for His Second Advent. Let us rise above our fears and soar in faith and trust in His unfailing grace and love. Amen!

Secondly, the sign of the Advent of Christmas is **a call for optimism in the midst of grave pessimism.** The conditions surrounding the first and second coming of the Son have common denominators. They stretch our faith and tempt us with many appealing alternatives. Do not let the struggles of this life blur the salvation of eternal life. Do not be enticed by the selfishness of this world. Embrace the selfless salvation of the Lord. The Bible forewarns us that the love of many shall wax cold prior to His Second Coming. We must stay proactive and positive in our walk with the Lord and trust Him unreservedly in His imminent Second Coming.

Thirdly, the sign of the Advent of Christmas is a call for resoluteness in persevering to the end. Do not be impatient or slacken in personal growth when you are going through slow progress and the future looks bleak. Do not give up and fall short when the Lord has never given up on any of us. In both Advents, the Bible reveals that many trials and tribulations shall befall us. However, we must steer resolutely and stay determined to walk humbly and holy till we see Him face to face. Rise above all physical, mental and emotional distress and soar into the perpetual, miraculous and eternal union as He prepares His bride for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Finally, consider this; virgin Mary stayed true to the Lord when she found out she was pregnant; facing potential death by stoning. Joseph trusted God's Word when he found out Mary was pregnant, even though he couldn't see how she could be pregnant. Unlike this couple, Herod rejected God when he heard of a child who would be king. They all faced life-threatening and difficult choices. The decisions they made finally made them. Joseph and Mary were praised by God. Herod died a horrific death. Paul the Apostle realized the indescribable gift of Immanuel when he wrote "If God is for us, who could be against us?"

Dear friends, will you,

- (1) Receive His Salvation if you have not yet done so?
- (2) Respond with Optimism and faith in His everlasting promises?
- (3) Restart a New chapter if you have been complacent and dismissive?

As we close, I want to offer 2 prayers. The second prayer is a united prayer for all of us. Firstly, I want to pray for those who want to receive the salvation of God or want to restart a fresh chapter with God. You may repeat after me in this prayer right now. Let's pray.