

## THE SHOW ME GOD

ISAIAH 7: 10-16

4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ADVENT

DECEMBER 19, 2004

SHEPHERD OF THE VALLEY LUTHERAN CHURCH

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This week, my sister will be coming home from Missouri for Christmas. Missouri's state nickname is the "Show Me State." I always thought that was a funny nickname for a state.

In one of those cases where one person's persona comes to represent an entire population, it seems that a Missouri Congressman by the name of Willard Duncan Vandiver was a wickedly stubborn individual. If he didn't want to accept something as true, he would retort, "I'm from Missouri, you'll have to show me!"<sup>1</sup> Somehow, this stubbornness came to be seen as a state virtue.

God must be used to people like Willard Duncan Vandiver because God always seems to be the "Show Me God." When we need proof of God's protection, God's love, God's salvation, he always seems to come through for us. He always shows us a sign that his love is real and his promises are true.

The rainbow in the time of Noah reminds us that God will never again set out to destroy the world but will instead leave that job to human beings. Our own baptisms are a visible and physical sign that our sins are washed away and we are reborn as children of God. Communion is another way that God shows that our sins are forgiven

as we share Jesus' body and blood. In all these ways, our Lord has always found ways to show us his love.

In our first lesson this morning, King Ahaz of Judah is being stubborn and difficult. The kingdoms of Israel and Syria to the north have formed an alliance to defeat Ahaz and he is very worried. He and his advisors are considering asking King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria to come to his aid. Assyria's help won't come cheaply, but it's better than defeat.

The only problem is that this one prophet named Isaiah is telling Ahaz and all of Judah that with God's help, they can withstand the superior forces of Israel and Syria all by themselves. Isaiah is trying to persuade the king that if God fights for Judah, then he doesn't need any other allies. Ahaz has only to believe that God's promise is true.

And as the "Show me God," Yahweh even offers to back up his promise with a sign. It can be anything that Ahaz wants: it can be as high as the heavens or as deep as hell. God will prove his word to Ahaz.

But Ahaz does not believe in Yahweh; he does not believe that Yahweh is powerful enough to protect his dynasty. For a long time, Ahaz has worshipped idols and false gods. His gods were the gods of the Assyrians<sup>2</sup> and he had no interest in anything that Yahweh, or Isaiah might want to say to him.

In pious terms, he rejects Isaiah's offer of a sign so that he can proceed to follow his own stubborn plan. But through Isaiah, Yahweh offers a sign anyway. Isaiah pronounces his prophesy, "Behold, a young woman in the king's household is about to conceive and bear a child, and you will call that child 'Emmanuel' because then you will know that 'God is with us'" (v. 14b).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.50states.com/bio/nickname3.htm>  
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=V000032>

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings 16:7-16

This promise has been given special significance by Matthew and by us as Christians, but initially this promise was a promise to Ahaz and his family. In the Hebrew language of Isaiah, this new mother is not a virgin; she is a young woman of child-bearing age, possibly one of Ahaz' many wives and certainly a woman known to Ahaz and Isaiah.

This promise was not made by Isaiah to refer to the distant future, but was likely to be revealed within months so that it could be a proof to Ahaz of God's ability to fulfill his promises. Likely the woman did not yet know she was pregnant or had not yet shared the news with Ahaz, but within the next few months, Ahaz would have to reconcile his lack of faith with daily awareness of the growing fetus inside the young mother.

Once again, Yahweh is the "Show me God," struggling to find a way to overcome doubt and stubbornness to prove his love and concern for his people.

Matthew of course reinterprets this prophesy to prove once again how deeply concerned God is with our salvation and security. Turning from the original Hebrew language to the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures, Matthew finds the Hebrew word for young woman to be translated into Greek as "virgin."

It's a faulty translation to be sure, but since the Greek translation was made long before the birth of Jesus, Matthew interprets this flaw in the translation as one more sign from God that Jesus is indeed the proof that Emmanuel! "God is with us!"

This begins Matthew's testament to the ultimate proclamation of God. What follows through the rest of Matthew's Gospel is proof upon proof, sign upon sign that God is indeed with us, caring for us, looking after us,

sharing our hurts and pains and healing us with his love and sacrifice.

From his birth in Bethlehem, to his ministry of healing the sick, the blind, the lame, and the deaf, to his welcoming of the outcasts, the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the drug addicts, and the crooks and criminals, Matthew documents how our "Show me God" acts out his plan to redeem the world and offer us salvation.

God has come down to dwell with us in the person of Jesus. This is the ultimate sign that God is indeed with us. And with proof like this, even Willard Duncan Vandiver of Missouri would be left speechless.