

Title: **The Virgin Birth and the Stubborn Grace of God**
Text: **Isaiah 7:1-14**
Date: **December 24, 2023**

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Big Idea

We likely know the promise of the virgin birth, but do we know the context in which this promise was made? When Isaiah 7:14 is seen in its broader biblical context, we realize at once that it's more than just a fantastic miracle. It is, above all else, a remarkable sign of God's sovereign and, even, stubborn grace!

1. A Shaking Heart (vv. 1-2)

For a little while now the foreign nation of Assyria had been an ascendant force on the historical scene—rising in power and influence, swallowing up smaller nations around them. And they were threatening to expand westward towards Palestine as well. So the little nations were trying to form an alliance, assuming they'd be stronger together in their opposition of the Assyrians. This is what the northern nations of Syria and Israel were doing at this point. And they wanted Judah, and Judah's king, to get in on it with them. But Ahaz refused. So they were attempting to come and depose him. Understandably, his heart was shaking. What should he do? Where should he turn for help? How could he stand firm in the storm?

2. A Wavering Faith (vv. 3-9)

Look at where God goes with Ahaz next. He sends Isaiah the prophet to him and it seems his goal is to first get the king to slow down, to stop, to "be quiet" and reflect with him a bit. Isn't that often what we need most when our hearts are shaking like trees in a windstorm? It seems counterintuitive, because we're thinking so much needs to be done. We can't stop. It's panic mode. It's go time. We're so worked up and worried. But what we need more than anything is to be quiet and remember who our God is. Only then do we start to see all this other stuff come back into its proper place. God gets bigger, everything else gets smaller.

3. A Stubborn Sign (vv. 10-14)

The stubbornness of Ahaz' faithlessness is met by the stubbornness of God's grace! Christmas is God supplying the sign we didn't even care enough to ask for. It's God aching the test we refused in our rebellion to administer in the first place. It's sovereign and stubborn grace. It's God coming in love for a people who don't want him. That's why the whole trajectory of Jesus' life begins in Bethlehem and ends in Calvary. It starts in a lowly manger and climaxes on a rugged cross. God would be near us though we would do everything we could to get away from him.

God invited Ahaz to ask for a sign from him—"let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven," he says (v. 11). Well, Jesus, the sign God gives Ahaz and us, truly does span these two realms, doesn't he?! He comes from the heights of heaven, as the eternal son of God. But, laying aside his glory, he descends, not just to earth, but to the depths of Sheol. He descends all the way to death for us. And then, to our great surprise, he spans the two realms once more, right? He rises up from the dead on third day, conquering Satan, sin, and death. He ascends back to the heavenly heights. But this time he takes human nature with him, opening the possibility for sinners like us to be lifted up and set in right standing and relationship with God as well. It's as C.S. Lewis writes in his classic work *Mere Christianity*: "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God." Or, listen to how he puts it elsewhere: "In the Christian story God descends to re-ascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity But He goes down to come up again and bring the ruined world up with Him" (Miracles).



Reflection Questions

- Have you ever seen this "Christmas" verse (Isa. 7:14) in its broader biblical context before? In what ways do you appreciate it more having now done so?
- In what ways do you personally feel like Ahaz must have here? Where is the wind howling in your life at present? At the deepest level, are you looking to the Lord for your deliverance or somewhere else?
- Why might this baby in a manger be the very sign you've been looking for? How does it minister to you today?

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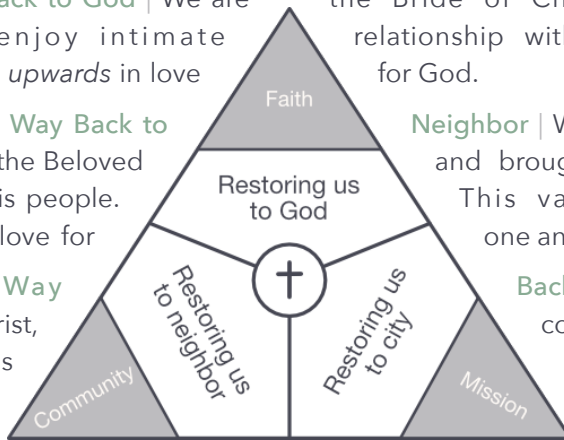
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Welcome to Mercy Hill Church.
We are so glad you've joined us today!

Announcement Spotlight

Mercy Hill's Week of Prayer - January 7-14

The church is always called to be praying and seeking God together, but sometimes it is good to set aside special time to do so. That's what we have made a habit of doing during the first week of every new year. This year the first Sunday in January is the 7th, so our Week of Prayer will span from January 7th to the 14th. More information is coming soon, but please mark your calendars and plan to dive into this with us. We're excited to see what our God will do!

For more information, feel free to contact us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.

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