



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

December 15, 2022  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent

Pastor James Enderle

First Lesson/Sermon Text: [Isaiah 7:1-17](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 24

Second Lesson: [Romans 1:1-7](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 1:18-25](#)

### **Behold! The Promised Savior is Near**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

If the airline gave you a ticket to anywhere, where would you go? Have you thought of that? If you won the lottery and wanted to go to any destination, where would you want to go? In addition to that, if you won the lottery you may have enough money to bring someone with you. If you could go anywhere and be with anyone, who would you take? Who would you spend time with? What would be the ideal place? It's interesting for us to think about that.

In about two weeks I'm going to one of my favorite places. It's a little far away. It takes about two days to get there. I'm going to Thailand. I will mainly be there for a meeting. I'm working with a program called 316NOW that does work online with Chinese people and there is a big meeting in Asia for all of the people that are working in Asia. So I get the honor to go to that and represent our program there. It just so happens that we have some friends from Milwaukee getting married two days before that in the same city, in Thailand. It's kind of a blessing to go there. When there is snow on the ground here, it's kind of nice to be there where it is a little bit warm.

That's one of the places I might choose personally and I get to bring my wife, so that question of where would you go and who would you bring, I get to have a nice answer for one of my favorite places.

When you think about that, different things might come to mind, different places, but when we think about God and who He wants to be with and where He wants to go, it's a good question to think about. Where does God want to be and who does God want to be with? God has all the power He wants, so He can do anything.

As we look at the last week of Advent and we just heard that great Advent Christmas song, *Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel*, I'm reminded of that promised Emmanuel, "God with us." We are going to look at how in Isaiah it was promised that God would be with us. What does that mean for us in our life now and the different things that we face, and what does that mean for us for our future and what we are going to face?

When we look at Ahaz, the story is quite interesting. If you read the heading and the background of the reading for today, you saw what it says about what had happened already. Judah, the southern part where Ahaz was ruling, was overrun and defeated already. In a single day they had lost 120,000 soldiers, and 200,000 wives, sons and daughters had been captured. God told Ahaz that he could trust Him and God would deliver him, but he wanted to do things his own way. Again, we are seeing the same thing. While he is trying to defend Judah from the people to the north, the king of Aram, Rezin, and also Pekah, the son of Remaliah king of Israel were marching against Jerusalem. This was not how things were supposed to go. This is not how Ahaz wanted things, but we have these two nations going against Judah (Aram and Ephraim). Ahaz thinks he can do it on his own. He is afraid. He sees them coming, but he doesn't really seek God for help.

It's a good question for us to ask, what do we do when things don't go as planned? Where do we turn to first? Ahaz was not turning to God first. He did not see and seek out God when things were good or when things were bad. When things were rough, he was still leaning on himself. When things are good or bad, what do we do? Who do we lean on? Where do we look? It's easy to dismiss God and think He is so far off or He doesn't care about what we are doing or what we are facing, so we forget to go to Him or trust Him. This is exactly what Ahaz was doing.

The blessing for us is that God is with us when things don't go as planned. We see this with Ahaz. God went out to him. He had Isaiah go and speak to him and tell him to not be afraid. God would deliver them. These two nations that think they can come and defeat Judah, He called them ***"these two smoldering stubs,"*** this thing that is not going to last. He points out that in just a few years, they won't matter. He reminds us that God is with us when things look dire and when things don't look right. In His encouragement He says these words: ***"If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."***

Look at that, if you don't stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all. When things are hard, what do we need to lean on? On God, on our faith, and if we can't stand on our faith, we're not going to stand on anything. God comes to us when things don't go as planned. But He also comes to those who are wavering and doubting. God goes to Ahaz and tries to comfort him and the people.

How does Ahaz respond? The Lord tells him, **“Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or the highest heights.** You’re not sure. You doubt. You’re afraid. The people are afraid. Ask God for a sign. This will give them comfort. This will give them peace. You can trust that what I say is going to happen.” Notice then what Ahaz says. He says: **“I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”**

At first this sounds like it could be a humble thing. We don’t want to put God to the test. There are other times where God gets upset at people when they ask for a sign, so why is this an issue? We know it’s an issue because of how God responds. Through Isaiah He says: **“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?”** This is showing that Ahaz was doing this out of the wrong reasons. God says, “Ask me for a sign” and Ahaz is like “No, I don’t need that. We’re fine. Forget that. We got it. We don’t need it.” Notice, God continues to come and share a promise and a message.

For us, when we are in our deepest, darkest places, for our friends who we want to reach out to and we don’t know what their faith is, God keeps coming to us and gives us chances to share the Word. We can share the truth with them even if they seem stubborn and don’t want to hear it. God continues to work. He continues to be with us. Even with those who waver and doubt.

How does He show us and how does He strengthen us when we are wavering and doubting, when things aren’t going right? He gives this promise. He says: “Even though you don’t want a sign, **the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.**” This great prophecy buried in this interesting story about a man too proud. This great prophecy about what God can do. When things are so difficult and we say “How can God save us?” God shows His power in saying **the virgin**, someone who cannot give birth, will give birth by the power of God. God can do anything.

We take what we have seen here of this man so proud and we have to jump forward to when this is fulfilled. We look at another man who is dealing with things that haven’t gone quite right. He is engaged and he finds out this woman is pregnant already. Notice the contrast between Ahaz and Joseph. Ahaz is proud and doesn’t want anything to do with God. It really doesn’t speak of him doing anything right. It speaks about Joseph as being a righteous man. But he was in doubt. He was fearful of what to do. He is supposed to marry this woman but she is pregnant already.

What does God do? He comes to the one who is doubting and worrying. He comes to sooth him and to help him when things are not going as planned. What does He promise? He promises one of the greatest blessings and message. We hear what the angel says. **“...do not be afraid...”** Joseph certainly was afraid of what was going on and what to do. The angel says **“...do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife,**

***because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).*** This child, this thing that was such an inconvenience and difficulty for Joseph at the time was the greatest thing—the promise and blessing of a Savior, of “God with us” Immanuel. They’ll call Him Jesus because He will save His people from their sins. God with us, to deliver us, to save us, to redeem us, to forgive us for our doubts and fears, to forgive us for our pride and the times we can’t trust in God. He is God with us now and in the future.

It’s interesting how Matthew talks about this and uses this prophecy. It’s the first time he quotes the Old Testament. If you know Matthew, he loves to quote the Old Testament. Right at the beginning of the book he talks about God with us. Then he ends the book with the Ascension and the promise that Jesus gives—that He’ll always be with us. He’ll never leave us. Surely He is with us always, to the very end of the age. ([Matthew 28:20](#)) So God is with us now in the most important times. When things go wrong, when we doubt, when we fear, we know our Lord is with us. He encourages us to stand firm in our faith, especially when it is shaken, when we are doubting, when we don’t see God. The truth is that God is with us.

Think about that for a second, too. When we ask where would you go and who would you spend time with, what did Jesus decide to do? God, the perfect God decided to leave perfection in heaven to become one of us, to be with us. He came to live among us. He came to be with you. Isn’t that amazing? Our God loves us so much that He lived among us, to suffer for us, to rise so that we will be with Him forever. He is a God with us, one who with all His power and might chose to come and be with us. He remains with us. He loves us and will never leave us. He will be with us and He looks at each and every one of us. From the cross He was thinking of each and every one of us, and He knows you. He knows our mistakes and our flaws and He still loves and forgives us. He wants to be with you.

So we look at our lives. We look at the world and we have to again say, where do we want to be and who do we want to be with? Yes, God gives us so many blessings and so many opportunities to do and be with many things, many places, many people, but what greater place to be than with our God—here in worship, in singing, at home, in Bible study—to know that we can be with our Lord at any time and that He is with us. He is guiding us. What joy to put God in front of us and to know that there are so many things we can do, but what joy it is to be with Him, to learn of His love and be able to share that with others so that they too can be with God—the God who loves us, the God who loves us so much he became one of us.

So today and forever behold, rejoice! Your God is not a distant God. He is a God who loves you. He is a God who is with us. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.