



Joseph had nothing to go by save the Word of God and he accepted it. A godless man would have said it was just a dream, but Joseph believed the word of God and took unto him his wife.

- Martin Luther -

Martin Luther's Christmas Book

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Isaiah 7:10-14

Isaiah's message came at a time when the people of Judah feared an impending conflict with the Syrians, along with the northern kingdom of Israel that sided with them. The plot of Israel's enemies was to conquer and replace King Ahaz with a king of their choosing. God's message through his prophet was that Judah need not fear: "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass" (v. 7:7).

King Ahaz was invited to ask for a sign by which God might prove the truth of His promise. Strangely, Ahaz responded "I will not put the Lord to the test" (v.12). Nevertheless, God proceeded to offer the sign of Immanuel, "God with us." These words turn out to be a prophecy, not only of God's deliverance in Israel's present conflict, but also a prophecy of God's final deliverance in the coming of Christ.

- *When Ahaz declined to ask for a sign, was it out of faithful humility before the Lord or was it a sign of his lack of trust in God? How do you read the situation?*
- *Why is it that, sometimes when God gives us the promise of his protection and deliverance we find it hard to believe? How does God's Word work to create faith in us, in spite of ourselves?*

Psalms 110:1-4

In this psalm we hear the promise of God to bless the kingly line of David. David was both servant of the Lord (*Adonai*) and the predecessor of the Messiah who will be a priest of the order of Melchizedek. This is a promise that was irrevocable, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind." (Psalm 110:4a)

As Christians we hear this prophetic worship psalm as the union of king and priest in the person of Jesus Christ. Not only is Jesus a descendant of King David, he is also David's Lord and God.

- *Ponder the relationship between David and Jesus. In what sense does Jesus have both a human and divine relationship with us?*
- *What does it mean to you to think about God's promises as irrevocable? How does this allow us to trust in God when our own self-confidence fails?*

1 John 4:7-16

"Love" is a word that gets tossed around fairly freely in our culture. But not all "love" is the same. The love that is mentioned in this passage is not simply a taste for, or a

passing interest in something. The love that John speaks of is a self-giving, unconditional kind of love that was shown to us by Jesus on the cross. This is what is referred to in the Greek language as *agape* (a-GAH-pay), or "sacrificial love."

John asserts that without intimate knowledge of God and his *agape* love in our lives, we are unable to love similarly. To love sacrificially comes from knowing God himself.

- *How might God help us to love those that we otherwise deem "unlovable?" How does God's love in us change the way we look at those who have been outcasts and strangers?*

It is important to understand this is a "Spirit-gifted" love, lest we assume that we can produce it on our own, by our own free will and capabilities. Once the Holy Spirit takes hold of our hearts, love is produced within us by God himself. It is God alone who allows us to love another person.

- *Have you ever felt like you loved someone deeply and really had no concrete reason why? Could it have been God's gift of *agape* love?*

Matthew 1:18-25

The promise presented to Joseph in a dream was that he would be the surrogate father of the one who would "save the people from their sins" (v. 21). Not only was the news of Mary's unplanned pregnancy a shock, but the angel confirmed to Joseph that she had indeed remained faithful, and that she now carried the Messiah of Israel in her womb. Talk about a hard concept to wrap one's mind around!

- *Put yourself in Joseph's shoes. What do you think you would have done in his place (and in his time)? How do you think God's direct revelation would have impacted you?*
- *Think about how shocking and dangerous Mary's situation actually was. What was at stake for her? Have you ever prayed for courage and discernment in a grave circumstance?*

Joseph was truly a remarkable and holy man. His compassion for Mary was beyond what was expected of him. Clearly God chose the right man to support and care for Mary as the *theotokos* (God-bearer) and for the King of kings himself.

- *Does God choose a person he knows will faithfully execute his plans? Or does God do the work in the person he chooses in order to accomplish his goals? Is there a difference? How do God's will and our will come together for the fulfillment of God's divine purposes?*
- *How does this story of Joseph and his courage and faith inspire your own desire to be faithful and courageous in the face of "impossible" circumstances?*