

THE DAWN FROM ON HIGH

Take-Home 3: The Sign of the Virgin (Isaiah 7:10-17)

WHAT WE FOUND

King Ahaz, under siege, was offered any sign he could imagine, "deep as Sheol or high as heaven," and refused with pious-sounding words; 2 Kings 16 shows where he had already gone for protection. So God went over his head to the whole house of David: "the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," God with us. Once again, God answered a geopolitical crisis with a child, and this time the child's name promises not something from God but God himself, present.

We opened our sealed guesses about what Israel was actually waiting for, and every guess in the room, king, rescue, peace, freedom, turned out to be true and too small. Then Matthew 1:18-25 showed us the sign delivered: the angel, Joseph son of David, the child conceived of the Holy Spirit, and our verse quoted with the word Jewish translators of the Greek Isaiah had chosen long before Matthew: *parthenos*, virgin. "Emmanuel (which means, God with us)." Israel was not only waiting for something from God. Israel was waiting for God.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Justin Martyr

Within a century of the apostles, Justin debated this very verse with a learned Jewish scholar, answering, in substance, that an ordinary birth is no sign at all, while God's promised sign is something without precedent. The Church has been discussing tonight's question, respectfully and from the text, since the second century.

Dialogue with Trypho, chapters 43 and 66-68 (2nd century)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Irenaeus

Irenaeus argues, in substance, that the rendering "virgin" cannot be Christian tampering, since Jewish scholars chose it long before Jesus was born. The reading Matthew used was already in Jewish hands.

Against Heresies 3.21 (2nd century)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Cyril of Alexandria

Cyril teaches, in substance, that Mary's child is not a man merely accompanied by God but God the Word truly made man. That is why Ephesus confessed Mary as Theotokos, God-bearer: to protect the full meaning of Emmanuel. Every time the Church says "God with us," she says what that council protected.

Second Letter to Nestorius, received by the Council of Ephesus (431)

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray the name: three times this week, sit for five quiet minutes with only the word Emmanuel. When your mind wanders, return to the name.
2. Make the visit, call, or note you thought of tonight, to the person for whom "God with us" sounds too good to be true. Presence is the point.
3. Three candles, rose week: keep the evening practice, adding this week's verse.

MEMORY VERSE

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us)." (Matthew 1:23)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read Isaiah 11:1-10 and Isaiah 61:1-4. Keep your opened guess somewhere safe: you will want it at our final session.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 484-486, 496-497, 744.