

December 21, 2025

Advent #4

“The Sign Confirms It”

Isaiah 7:10-16

Intro:

Irish comedian Hal Roach tells a story of one Father Murphy. It so happened that there was a terrible rainstorm in the town where Father Murphy was serving, and it caused a great flood to take place. Father Murphy found himself in the church with the waters rushing in and quickly the waters had risen so much that he was forced to take refuge on top of the altar. It was at this point that several of the parishioners came by in a boat and they called out “Father, you should come with us before it is too late”.

But Father Murphy was a man of great faith and he responded “No, no. I have faith that the good Lord will save me from this flooding.”

Well, it wasn’t much longer before Father Murphy was forced to retreat to the roof of the church. Along came a second boat and the people in that boat also called out “Father, you’ve got to come with us and save yourself before it is too late.”

As before, he responded by saying “No, no. I have faith that the good Lord will save me from this flooding.”

It didn’t take too long before the flood waters had risen so high that Father Murphy was forced to climb onto the roof of the bell tower. A third boat came by and the people called out “Father Murphy! This is your last chance to save yourself. You’ve got to come with us.”

And as the other two times, Father Murphy replied that he had faith in the good Lord to save him.

Well, Father Murphy soon found himself standing before St. Peter at the pearly gates. “I... I just don’t get it” he said, “I had faith, and was sure that the Lord would save me. What happened?”

“Well,” replied St. Peter. “We did send three boats, don’t ya know.”

As human beings, we tend to put an unusual amount of stock in signs. I'm talking here about signs that we use to confirm a decision, or give guidance on something, or to tell us how a certain direction in life will turn out. We use phrases like "If I am supposed to take this job, show me a sign". At moments of indecision, we interpret an external experience as a sign for what we should do or how we should act. For example, someone who is trying to decide if they should go left or right, sees a tumbleweed blow by heading toward their right, and they perceive that as confirmation that they should go right. It certainly isn't a scientific method, but for some reason it gives people comfort. Or maybe what it really does is gives us something to blame other than ourselves, if things don't turn out how we hope.

The really amazing thing about so many of the signs that we give credit to, is that they point to, or support, the choice we wanted to make. "I was trying to decide if I should eat an ice cream cone, and just at that moment I saw a little kid walking down the street eating an ice cream cone. Clearly it was a sign." Of course, no mention is made of the many "signs" before that that could be interpreted as discouraging me from eating that ice cream cone.

We apply the same flawed system of logic to God. We want Him to give us a sign to show us what we should do, or to confirm something about a promise He has made, or even just to prove that He exists. But we ignore or reject many of those signs because they don't line up with the comfortable Christian life that we want to live and be in charge of. We want God to prove "it", but in reality we want God to fit into the box of our narrative and so we reject any sign from Him that doesn't fit.

The Sign:

As we have already read in Isaiah 7, King Ahaz is someone who was trying to game the sign system. Now, Ahaz wasn't a good king in Judah and did a lot of things that went against following God, so it is a bit odd that God would be giving Ahaz assurances that the troubles he was currently facing would be defeated. But that is where the narrative has taken us. Isaiah has come to Ahaz and invited him to

ask for any sign he wants from God to serve as proof that God will deliver on the promises that He makes. Ahaz does something a little differently. He refuses to make a suggestion because he would not dare to put God to the test. Sounds all very nice and humble and religious and for those of you recalling your New Testament, sounds a lot like the phrase Jesus used to rebuke one of the temptations he faced from Satan. But it is all a ruse. Ahaz is not afraid of offending God. His leadership track record speaks to that. No, what he is afraid of is that if he suggests a sign, no matter how outlandish and crazy it might be, that God would deliver such a sign and Ahaz would then be forced to concede that God is all that He says He is, and Ahaz would then have to make some serious changes in his own life – which he doesn't want to do. So, he presents a false humility in hopes that God will just let the whole thing go.

But this isn't about Ahaz and his reputation or hopes and dreams or plans in any way. This is about God's honour. It is about His character of faithfulness and being true to what He has promised. As such, God provides the sign. And it is a sign that is beyond anything Ahaz (or us, for that matter) could dream of.

Isaiah 7:14:

“All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).”

Jesus is the Sign:

We are waiting for a sign from God. Some sign that will show us that things aren't going to be as bad as we think they are, or that they appear to be. We want a sign from God that confirms the decisions we want to make. We want a sign from God that gives us permission to live how we want to. God doesn't give us those signs.

He has given us a sign, though, one that confirms the thing we need to have and know, not what we think we want.

In the town of Bethlehem, some 2000 and more years ago, a baby was born and placed in a manger. This baby was certainly a gift to the world, even if many in the world do not acknowledge that. But even more, this baby was a sign... was *the* sign of something great that we all need. This baby, Jesus, is the sign of God's love for his creation. Jesus is the sign - the radical, unimaginable, and miraculous sign that confirms that God has been, is, and will continue to be faithful to the promises that He makes to his people, and that we are in fact loved by Him.

What a wonderful sign. It is worth waiting for. But we don't have to wait for it, because it has already been given. We just have to accept it.

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son."

Romans 5:8 "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."

Conclusion:

As this Advent season draws to a close, use the time of waiting to reflect on just how much God loves you, and what that might mean for you. What does it mean to you to know that God, the creator of the universe, loves you to such a great extent? Maybe take some time to write those reflections down and to offer them as a prayer of thanksgiving. Take time as well to reflect on and remember when and how God has been present and faithful in your life. Maybe there are times that he showed himself faithful, but your eyes were not open enough to see it. Ask God to open your eyes so that you can not only recognize those moments in the past, but also recognize them in the present and future. In the light of this love, allow every other sign or direction from God to be recognized as pointing toward what is good for you, even if it doesn't line up with what you think is good for you (or what you want to be good for you). Whatever you do, and however you do it, just don't be like Father Murphy and miss the boat.

Let's pray.