

"Christmas Message" (Isaiah 7:14)

It is that time of the year again when we remember the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Even if you do not believe in Christmas, you no doubt, believe that Jesus Christ was born on a certain day in a certain month in the city of Bethlehem to a virgin called Mary in fulfillment of God's prophetic promises. It is this truth that we gratefully celebrate.

One of the many prophecies about the birth of Jesus Christ is (Isaiah 7:14, NKJV):

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." Have you ever queried, as I have, the contextual appropriateness of this prophecy? It is humbling, though, to always remember that whatever apparent "flaws" we find in the Word of God have to do more with our understanding or rather, misunderstanding than with the Word of God itself.

In the context of (Isaiah 7:1-14), particularly (vv. 10-14), the prophecy is by no means out of context because it deals with a sign (v. 10). God commanded king Ahaz to ask for a sign in order to, I believe, shore up his weak faith. Ahaz was having a hard time believing God's assurance of deliverance in (v. 7) as indicated by God's warning to him in (v. 9b): "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established."

Gideon asked for a sign when he had a similar crisis of faith (Judges 6:36-40; 7:9-11). But Ahaz with his false sense of spirituality and humility would not ask for a sign at the command of God: "... I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD," he said (v. 12). It was at this juncture that God gave the prophecy in question through His servant, Isaiah: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

What is the relevance of this prophecy to the issue Ahaz was dealing with? God had given him a promise of deliverance from an alliance of formidable enemies he faced, Syria and Israel. But there is an alliance of more formidable enemies mankind was facing - - sin, self, and Satan that needed to be overcome. The promise of the Son, Immanuel, to be born would bring

deliverance from this evil trinity. By the way, the havoc and misery they are causing around the world and in your life are self-evident, are they not? Immanuel has come to deal with them!

About 700 years later, God sent His messenger again to Judah for a fulfillment of the prophecy He gave to Ahaz in (Isa. 7:14). This time the messenger was not a prophet but an angel, Gabriel and the recipient of the message was not a king in a palace but a poor virgin girl called Mary living in "...a city of Galilee named Nazareth..." (Matt. 1:18-22; Luke 1:26-38).

The circumstance of the birth of the Son was peculiar. He was to be born of a virgin. The virgin birth of Jesus is not a theological trifle, for there must not be any confusion or uncertainty regarding the purity and divine origin of the Son, Immanuel. Mary had never known any man sexually. And we need to note that she was not the only virgin in Israel at the time. No wonder the angel regarded her selection as an act of grace or divine favour (Luke 1:28).

It was not only the circumstance of the birth of the Son that was peculiar, His name, Immanuel, was also peculiar. The name is descriptive and theological; it is a name with a heavenly and earthly significance. This Son is to be incarnate deity, the God-man (John 1:1, 14; Phil. 2:5-8). Regarding the earthly significance of the name, Immanuel, the Transcendent God (the God-above-all) would become the Immanent God (God-in-our-midst). And here we find the meaning and joy of Christmas, for God sent His Son, Jesus, otherwise called Immanuel, to save us from our sins, from self and from Satan.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with two important implications of Immanuel; implications of Christmas:

First Implication: You must receive Jesus into your heart, i.e., you must submit your life to Him, the God who has come down to save you from your sins and make you His own (John 1:12, 13). Failure to receive Him will earn

you hell, the last place God would want a person He made in His image to go or end up.

Second Implication: Having received Him as Saviour, you must live constantly in the consciousness of His divine presence through the help of the Holy Spirit. This is what gives you assurance of victory over sin, self and Satan, as well as the many ordinary, yet difficult challenges of life.

Have a merry and memorable Christmas!

Dr. Joshua Uhiara
President, MVM