**“A Sign”**

Psalm 24

Isaiah 7:10-17

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-25

 Advent 4

“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).”

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

**Bridge**

Sometimes it’s best to know where you’re **going** in order to know where you **are**. I’ve (for the most part) written my Christmas Eve message. Other than a different Epistle reading, it shares this weekend’s texts. Isaiah 7 gets fulfilled in Matthew 1. A “sign will be given by the Lord”, and that sign is the baby who will be “God with us” or “Immanuel”, born of a virgin.

Where we are going Tuesday evening is **beholding** **the sign of** **“God with us” in a baby sleeping in a manger, born of Mary (a virgin who should not have been pregnant except by the miraculous conception of the Holy Spirit of God)**. The “**Sign**” **is given** **to the earth**: it’s **God born of a woman**, breathing and needing sleep and the nourishment of a mother’s milk. Earth had never seen God packed into something weighing 7 or 8 pounds. But it was **promised to be that**. The promise itself wasn’t the “sign”, but it **pointed to it (Him)**. “Sign” in Hebrew is “**owth**”, but that means a “**marker**” more than a “portend” or “promise”. That “owth” got promised, in Isaiah, to become an **actual “marker” even beyond “portend” or “promise”**: a “**monument**” or “**stanchion**” that really will exist.

Best for **this weekend** (a few days before the event) may be to unpack that “promised” “Stanchion” as “**God with us**” as foretold … “**God**” coming to us.

**Text**

A Psalm assigned to today in every Christian Church all over the world is the **24th**, dealing with **God who became with us** at Christmas (Divinity of that baby). Turn, please, to Psalm 24 in the front of your hymnals, and hear of the “**King of Glory**” who joined humanity in Bethlehem.

“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof”, which is not just Bethlehem or, even, Jerusalem (the much bigger city), but “**the world** and **those who dwell therein**” (**us** to the very last of us in any of earth’s corners), for **He has founded all of it**” it says “upon the seas and established upon the rivers.” God (born / come to be with us) is none other than that **Creator of all that He joins in earthly birth**. And we (with all things) are the **creation of the Christmas baby**.

And it is asked of us as creation: “**Who** shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And **who** shall stand in His holy place?” **Who** can go where God is (on our own)? **Who** (on earth) can span the gap of Heaven and earth … ascending (climbing) from **down here** to **up there where God had normally dwelled**? **Angels** travel the distance **by God’s bidding**, but only **God** can bridge the realms **by His own choice and volition**. Christmas remembers **His travel downward**, assuming “with us” human flesh, having **descended** in order to **make possible** the **ascent of all other human flesh**.

And upon accomplishing **THAT TASK**, Jesus resumed, then, **His** heavenly place, having died but risen to, then, Himself, ascend and carry humanity into Heaven’s throne. But **here** He left also His righteousness as a gift to us (**it** to cleanse and purify us) so that even (“**God with us**” / “**we** who **have clean hands** and a **pure heart**” received as His gift) **gain our also ascent** as “one ascribed who **does not** lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. **These / we** will **receive** blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation”.

Our baptism into, then, God (the baby of Bethlehem) **cleanses our hearts and soul / us** **inside** and does-so like only God can make **that happen**, indwelling in us by His Spirit so indeed **in us personally is** “Immanuel” / “**God** **with us**”.

“**Clean hands and pure heart**” is never ours **of ourselves, but the gift of Christmas onto the end of God’s work here on earth in the Son, Jesus**. Our cleanliness and purity is a “**God with us**” **thing**. Our **ascension** is our baptismal and faith **linkage to Him** “**such that we’re made**” (as the Psalm calls believers) “**the generation of those who seek Him**, who **seek the face of the God of Jacob**”.

And, so, we of **that** “**generation**” **remind ourselves of this**, to “Lift up your heads, O gates!” **remembering** “Immanuel’s” entrance not only to the world but also into **our hearts**. Actually, **we** are the “**gates**” and the “**ancient doors**” who, **in worship**, do and need to “**lift up our heads**” and “**be lifted up**”. Two days before Christmas’ Eve, we beg to be included in joy by God’s opening-up of our hearts: “O holy Child of Bethlehem, **descend** **to us we pray**; **cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today**. **We** hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell; O **come to us**, **abide ‘with us’**, **our Lord Immanuel**!”

“**Lift up your heads, O gates!** And **be** **lifted up, O ancient doors**, **that the King of Glory may come in**. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle! **Lift up your heads, O gates!** And **lift them up, O ancient doors**” (however we can **contribute** **to that wonder**, **opening our hearts to it and putting ourselves into places where that remembrance can be aided**), “that the King of Glory **may come in**. **Who is this King of glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory!**” ….

An angel told Joseph in a dream: “You shall **call His name** **Jesus** for He (what the name “Jesus” means) will, (**as God / Yahweh**) **save His people from their sins**. And all this **took place** to **fulfill** what the Lord had spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us)”. The “**Sign**” as a “owth” of “portend” and “promise” got **fulfilled** to be a “**Sign**” as a “**Marker**” of a “**Stanchion**”: a “**Monument**” in the **flesh and blood of a baby** … “**GOD come to Be WITH US**”.

**Application**

Well, Christmas Eve is only two nights away and you should know that **we** are (in a real sense) “**Bethlehem**” that we sing of (into where Jesus was born). That carol is, literally (beyond the small town) about **each one of us** as the “**place**” **to which God came to be Immanuel (born with us)**. “O little town of (I could sing) **Curt**” (and you have your own versions), “how still **I’m** seen lying. Above **my** deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars **do** go by where I’m at; **yet** **in my dark streets shines The Everlasting Light, Jesus!** The hopes and fears of all the years are **met** **in ME that night** …

… so “O Holy Child, descend to **me**, I pray. Cast out **my** sin, and **enter in**, be **born in me today**.” In +His name, **Jesus**. Amen.