

4th Sunday of Advent (Cycle A) Homily
Saint William, Champion | December 18, 2022
Is 7:10-14 | Rom 1:1-7 | Mt 1:18-24

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In our modern day world, we have become very dependent on signs... those little – or maybe not so little things that help us live from day to day, get us to where we want to go, and help us to do the things that we should do, as well as helping us avoid the things we shouldn't do. For example, we have signs with the names of streets, STOP signs, SPEED LIMIT signs, even signs that tell us where we're supposed to ENTER and where we're supposed to EXIT. I saw a couple of interesting ones several months ago down in North Carolina. The first one: "THOU SHALT NOT EVEN THINK ABOUT PARKING HERE". The second one: "PASTOR PARKING ONLY", and below it in smaller print, "ALL VIOLATORS WILL GIVE THE SERMON NEXT SUNDAY".

The comedian Jeff Foxworthy had a favorite routine – he wanted people who weren't so bright to wear "Stupid" signs to make things easy for the rest of us. For example, "It's like before my wife and I moved from Texas to California our house was full of boxes and there was a U-Haul truck in our driveway. My

friend comes over and says, 'Hey, You moving?' Nope. We just pack our stuff up once or twice a week just to see how many boxes it takes."

Today's readings are all about – yep, you guessed it – signs. In our first reading, King Ahaz gets a visit from the prophet Isaiah. What our reading doesn't tell us is that Ahaz was the King of Judah, the Southern kingdom of Israel, at the time when the Northern kingdom and Syria were gaining power and closely allied, and were threatening to attack Judah. Everyone throughout Judah was greatly worried about what might happen.

In this midst of all this concern, Isaiah appears and boldly tells Ahaz: Ask for a sign from your God! Make it anything you want... As deep as Hell to as high as Heaven... Anything! To which Ahaz coyly responds, "I will not ask! I will not tempt the Lord!" Isaiah sees through this veil of false humility and piety, and chides Ahaz for trying the patience of God, and responds... "the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel." In other words – OK, God will give you a sign that is so impossible you can't ignore it.

The question is, why didn't Ahaz take Isaiah and God up on their offer?

This happened years after Moses and the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea, and I'm sure that like any good Jew, Ahaz knew what God had done in the past for His people. He could have asked for victory over his enemies, or maybe for God to change their hearts, or even for peace. And yet, he effectively told Isaiah and God – nope. I'm good. I don't need anything. Ahaz was so wrapped up in himself and trusting in his own strength that he had no room for God.

Ultimately, things didn't go so well for him, as the Northern kingdom and Syrians attacked and killed over a hundred thousand of his army, including his son, and plundered his cities, taking many people captive.

But don't we know people who are just like Ahaz? Maybe we're even like him at times, when we don't want a sign from God, because that would mean that we would have to make room for Him in our lives?

Today is a reminder that we will see Emmanuel – God with us, coming in what seems to be an impossible way, born of a virgin. It's a miraculous sign of the love God has for us – a reminder that His love for us far exceeds anything that we can think of in all the messiness of our lives - all our guilt, shame,

unworthiness, all the ways in which we think we are ugly and unlovable. His love sees beyond our flaws and finds what is good. It's a sign we celebrate each time we gather for mass, when we recite the Creed: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man." And it is appropriate to bow when we speak of the incarnation and birth of Jesus when we recite the Creed.

For all of those times in which we asked God for a sign – here is the ultimate answer. Are we watching for it?