

Merry Christmas! **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”**

The Christmas season is a season full of signs. Christmas lights are a sign of the season, and we all know Rotary Lights with the magic of over 3 million lights and some of those lights are arranged into signs. For example, there is a UWL sign as well as signs for the various branches of the armed forces.

Every time we see a sign, we need to ask who sent the sign, what is the sign, and what is trying to tell me? For example, a city will send these signs, it is a red octagon, and you don't need to read to know what it means. It means, stop!

In our Old Testament text, God sent a sign, an Immanuel sign. Immanuel means God with us. **BECAUSE HE WILL NEVER ABANDON YOU, THE FATHER SENT JESUS AS THE LAST AND GREATEST IMMANUEL SIGN.** Throughout the Bible, the Lord sent various signs telling His people that He was with them.

Let's go over some of these other examples. I. Yahweh sent other Immanuel signs. In fact, the Hebrew word for sign, אֵימָנֶה, occurs seventy-nine times in the Old Testament. The Lord sends these signs to tell you He still loves you and hasn't abandoned you.

The Israelites in the land of Egypt felt abandoned. Pharaoh was oppressing them and their very lives were threatened as Pharaoh tried to commit genocide against their people by instructing the baby boys be killed and having their people do hard labor. God raised up Moses and sent various signs to prove to Pharaoh that they meant business. These signs were also known as the ten plagues. The most significant being the tenth plague wherein the angel of death killed the firstborn sons in Egypt. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, **“The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.”** The blood on the doorpost was a sign that death would pass over the household. This was a God with us sign as it was a promise of the Lord being with His people to rescue them from Egypt.

Another sign going back to the first book of the Bible. After flooding the earth and killing almost all of humanity. The Lord gave Noah the sign of a rainbow saying, **“I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.”** Every time you see a rainbow, you remember God's mercy in that He promises not to destroy the Earth with a flood. The rainbow is a

God with Us Sign telling you that God could have destroyed the entire earth and started fresh, but He still has compassion on us broken sinners.

One last example before we move on to our text from Isaiah 7, and I will spend a bit of time on this as it complements our Christmas story so closely. II. Yahweh sent Cain an Immanuel sign. After humanity sinned in the Garden, God came out of the gates with a promise of salvation, speaking to Satan, the Lord said, **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”** From the beginning, the Lord promised humanity that the offspring of Eve would defeat the devil.

Perhaps Eve thought that this promise would be fulfilled in her lifetime. She gave birth to Cain. Would he be the promised savior? Clearly not, when it came time for Cain the farmer and Abel the shepherd to present a sacrifice to the Lord, Cain’s sacrifice of produce was insufficient compared to Abel’s sacrifice of sheep. Cain was jealous and killed his brother.

The Lord then confronted Cain about this. The Lord cursed Cain and the ground would no longer produce food for him. Instead, he would be a fugitive and wanderer. **“Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”**” Cain realized what he had done and lamented that he needed to run for his life, that he couldn’t farm, but most of all, that he would be separated from the presence of God.

In an act of mercy, the Lord put a mark on Cain to prevent anyone from killing him. This word mark is the exact same word for sign. The Lord gave Cain a sign, just like the blood on the doorposts, just like the rainbow, that death and destruction should pass over him.

The sign of Cain is the sign that the Lord gives to the world around us. Not many have killed their brother, but all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Sin drives humanity from the presence of God. The world around us wanders as fugitives. But the sign of Cain signifies the Lord’s protection so that one day, they can believe in the Immanuel sign. **“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”** The Lord is keeping you alive so that you can tell others about the blessed Immanuel sign that is Jesus.

Thus, III. Yahweh sends you the Immanuel sign. **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”** Yahweh accomplished in Mary what Eve could have only dreamed of. Whereas Eve gave birth to the world’s first murderer who would be cast from the presence of God, Mary would give birth to the world’s

only Redeemer who would reconcile the world to Himself. In this sign we see the curse being reversed as something better than the sign of Cain is born in Bethlehem.

Cain's inadequate sacrifice of plants brought jealousy and separation, but Immanuel's sacrifice of Himself brought reconciliation and peace. Cain's murder caused the earth to cry for vengeance, but the Earth's murder of Jesus cries for our pardon. Cain gave up farming because of his crime, but Jesus raised from the dead is confused for a gardener in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Who else but Abel-bodied shepherds are some of the first to see the sign of Immanuel. **“And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”** Shepherds, just like Abel, the murdered brother of Cain, came to the manger that evening to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Rejoice this evening, dear Christian friend. In Christ Jesus, God is with you. The sign of Cain is no longer yours. Life isn't just wandering one day at a time glad that you aren't dead yet. Your sign is Immanuel, God with us. This Immanuel sign was bestowed upon you in baptism.

On this Christmas Eve, you are no longer defined by your greatest or latest sin. You aren't the sum of your mistakes and oversights. God is with you even as He was with Mary and Joseph in the manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. You are wrapped in the swaddling cloths of Christ's righteousness. God with you signifies that the Father sees Jesus' perfection in you rather than Cain's murderous jealousy.

On this Christmas Eve, you are not a patchwork of anxieties as you flee from guilt like Cain did in the land of Nod. No longer does fear need to flow through your veins like Cain standing red handed before a holy God. Immanuel has been born on Christmas. **“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”** In place of fear and anxiety is God with you to deliver you good news and joy.

On this Christmas Eve, you need not feel lonely like Cain who left family and friends because he murdered his brother. Immanuel is the sign that even if you go home alone tonight, you are never ever alone. God is with you! This Christmas child visits you and dwells in your heart, and more than that, He gives you the gift of the Church which is a surrogate family that even now joins you to pray, to praise, and to give thanks.

The blood on the doorposts, the rainbow, and even the mark of Cain, all of these signs point to the greater sign, namely, Jesus Christ, who fulfills all of God's promises, and whose birth tells you that God hasn't and doesn't give up on you or abandon you.