

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ –

[Introduction]

21 million views. It spawned #thedress.

Remember back in early 2015, almost 5 years ago there was a debate about this dress.

[show the picture]

It went viral. It was splashed all over the news. What a cultural phenomenon!

Some saw the color as blue and black. Others saw white and gold.

It was an optical illusion. It all depended upon how you looked at it.

What a Sign Means—Depends upon How You See It.

[For Ahaz]

Take the sign of Immanuel.

The sign of Immanuel was judgment for Ahaz.

Ahaz lived in a time of fear and doubt.

He was a king in the dynasty of Judah.

A king of the southern kingdom.

In the south there were eight good kings, and Ahaz was not one of them.

Now, Syria and Israel (that Northern Kingdom and sometimes called Ephraim),

Syria and Israel had formed an alliance against Judah.

They laid siege to the city of Jerusalem and

were determined to destroy the Southern Kingdom (Is 7:1–2).

Ahaz should have trusted in Yahweh to deliver him, but he was an unbeliever.

He worshiped idols, and rather than seeking God’s help, he turned to Assyria.

To get the attention of Ahaz, Yahweh sent Isaiah. He sent Isaiah to give Ahaz hope.

Isaiah said, “Do not fear” (v 4).

The plan of Ahaz’s enemies would fail, and Ephraim would be destroyed (vv 7–8).

Ahaz should stand strong and put his faith in Yahweh (v 9).

But Ahaz did not believe.

Yahweh told Ahaz to ask for a sign confirming his word (vv 10–11).

AND Ahaz refused.

He refused because he preferred the help of Assyria to believing God (v 12).

Ahaz saw this offer of a sign as an unwanted intrusion into his plans.

Yet Yahweh gave Ahaz the sign of Immanuel.

“The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (v 14).

<u>First, the good news:</u> Before the boy is old enough to know right from wrong, Syria and Israel will be gone (vv 15–16).	<u>Then the bad news:</u> Because Ahaz didn’t believe God, worse trouble will come upon him and Judah!
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The good news paled in comparison to the bad news.

For Ahaz, the sign of Immanuel was a sign of judgment,
because he saw the sign as an inconvenience, and

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[For Mary and Joseph]

For Mary and Joseph it was just the opposite!

The sign of Immanuel was Good News for Joseph and Mary.

Joseph and Mary lived in a time of fear and doubt.

They lived in an occupied country—Judah was under Roman rule.

Mary was pregnant, but they weren’t yet married, only engaged.

So, Joseph assumed Mary had been unfaithful to him (Mt 1:18).

Joseph was considering “divorce,” that is,
breaking off the engagement (v 19).

God sent an angel to give Joseph hope.

“Do not fear to take Mary as your wife” (v 20).

The baby in Mary’s womb was God’s Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit (v 20).

God gave Joseph the sign of Immanuel.

Mary’s Son would be called Jesus, “for he will save his people from their sins” (v 21).

This was to fulfill Isaiah’s Immanuel prophecy (vv 22–23).

Jesus is Immanuel, “God with us.”

Joseph believed God.

Joseph saw this sign of the virgin birth as a reassurance,

not only of Mary’s virtue, but also of God’s grand design coming to fruition.

Therefore, Joseph took Mary home as his wife (vv 24–25).

For Joseph and Mary, the sign of Immanuel was a sign of
forgiveness and promise, because

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[For You]

What does the sign of Immanuel mean to you?

We live in a time of fear and doubt.

The dysfunction of government and politics fill the airwaves and
blog down your Facebook.

Wall Street is doing well, but we doubt for how much longer.

We all know it can tumble. And what does that mean for our retirement?
And it seems more than ever, many people have anxiety and fear,
because they cling to false gods and idols of this world
instead of fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things.

God sent Jesus to give us hope.

Jesus says, “Do not be afraid” (Mt 28:10) and “Fear not” (Rev 1:17).

Jesus gives us peace (Rom 1:7).

Jesus saves us from our sins (Mt 1:21).

God gives us by the sign of Immanuel.

Jesus is God in human flesh, Immanuel, “God with us.”

And by coming in the flesh, God took our fears, our conflicts, our sins on himself.
Then that flesh, God with us in the flesh, was killed to take them all away.

Yes, Jesus is still present with us in his Supper.

<p><u>The bad news:</u> God is with us (Immanuel) in the Lord’s Supper as a sign of judgment if we do not discern his body and blood.</p>	<p><u>The Good News:</u> God is with us (Immanuel) in the Lord’s Supper as a sign of forgiveness if we discern the body and blood of Christ.</p>
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Jesus is with us forever (Mt 28:20; Jn 14:18).

How do you see the sign?

<p>If you deny Christ and reject his grace, like Ahaz, then it is a sign of judgment.</p>	<p>But if you believe in Jesus Christ and his forgiveness, it is a sign of hope and forgiveness.</p>
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“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31)!

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Merry Christmas! Amen