

Sermon 2009 Christmas Eve
Text: Isaiah 7:10-14
Theme: "Fine! Spoil the Surprise!"

The excitement always started for me in October with Halloween. Nothing a fat kid like me loved better than getting pillow cases full of free candy. Then came my birthday just 6 days later with presents and my favorite meal of fried chicken and mashed potatoes and white cake with chocolate icing; and about two weeks after that was Thanksgiving which was always a huge holiday in my house with tons of food and all the family together. Then Advent starts with all the preparations for Christmas and suddenly, boom, there was Christmas. Then there was the long dry spell. It was always hard to get through those long, cold, uneventful winter months until Easter.

I saw Christmas as the end of all the fun and I had to wait 10 months for it to all start again. I think a lot of people see Christmas as the end. That is why there is so much depression this time of year. People certainly spend as though it were the end of days. Sometimes older people even mark their lives with Christmas when they say, "Well, this might be my last

Christmas.” That’s funny isn’t it? Do we think that there is no Christmas in heaven? Do we think Jesus’ birth is not celebrated in His kingdom? Like King Ahaz, we too often miss the point.

Was Ahaz a believer in God? Well, it seemed he was, but he wanted to keep God in a box. He wanted God to stay out of his political affairs and just stay on a shelf for special occasions. So he would make alliances with the enemies of God’s people to protect them from other enemies. When we keep God in a box, we are holding ourselves back from the full joy of Heaven.

Christmas is not the end of all the fun. Remember that while the world starts a calendar year after Christmas, the Church started its year four weeks ago, so Christmas is not at the end of our year but at the beginning. According to the Church calendar, this is only the fourth week of a new year! And Christmas is not the end of anything but a sign of a wonderful surprise that is coming.

See, if Jesus had not come. If he had not been born, then he would not have grown up in this sin filled, broken to pieces world and been crucified and damned in our place. If Jesus had

just stayed in heaven with his father, the universe would have continued to unravel until one day, God would have had enough and we would have been back to the days of Noah, only this time there may have been no one left and the world would be over.

But Jesus did come and that is why this night is holy. This night became the sign that things would not progress as they had in Noah's time but that God was intervening this time in a different way. This time instead of one family being saved through water while the rest perished, all people could be saved through water. Through the waters of Baptism we are brought into a covenant that God made.

Tonight Isaiah stands before us as he stood before King Ahaz and points towards God. See the sign of the baby in the manger and know that as he came once through birth in a manger, he will come again – but this time in the clouds, descending from heaven and accompanied by the angel host with trumpets blaring and light splitting the universe from end to end. This night in a humble manger portends the next coming in glory.

Isaiah went and spoiled the surprise! He grew tired of human beings doubting God and trying to do everything on their own and he just jumped to the big moment. Do you love to guess at what a present might be? Do you shake it and weigh it and size it up? Do you intentionally wrap presents in oddly shaped containers so that the detectives in your house cannot figure them out? Isaiah was not a very good secret keeper. He grew impatient with the whining and finally just blurted it out.

“Look, you bunch of ninny’s! A virgin is going to give birth to a son and he will be God with Us. Got it?” Wow. What does that mean? Well that means that God takes on human flesh and so instead of depending on our own devices to fix all the problems, we can depend on him. It means that if he came as he promised once, we can depend on him to come again, as promised. And most importantly, and this is the best Christmas present of all, it means that he will not come in judgment for us, but in salvation to gather all of us who have been marked by the waters of Baptism and made his own brothers and sisters.

Tonight is a holy night. It is not the end of anything but a sign to us that something far better is on the way. This night is the promise fulfilled we cling to when we are tempted to doubt that God is really up there or that even if he is there, does he really care about us? This night is the promise we cling to when the world seems to be going to hell in a hand basket because we know that whatever is broken will be fixed. Everything will be healed. Our losses returned. Our loved ones resurrected. WE LOSE NOTHING! Because everything that needs to be done has been done by the one who was born on this night. This night is just the beginning of the party, a shadow of things to come, a reflection from a broken mirror – but the banquet awaits us when the he returns. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.