

# The Bethel Pulpit

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**BETHEL**

LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the web at [www.bethel-madison.org](http://www.bethel-madison.org)

217 Wisconsin Ave. Madison WI 53703

Readings - Matthew 1:18-25 and Isaiah 7:10-16

“The Gift—To Us and Through Us”

You are the gift that others are waiting and wanting to receive from you this year. It’s not what you may buy or what you may promise or offer, it’s you. And when I say that it’s you, it’s me as well. God has created us to be a gift to one another and in order for us to be a healthy and helpful gift to one another, He offers the Gift of himself, the gift of His Son whose birth we will celebrate this week. That then becomes the gift, the God given Immanuel—God with us—that we get to pass on to each other. You are the gift that others are waiting and wanting to receive from you this year. Now before we look at each other and think “is that all I’m getting for Christmas?”, let’s let our texts share their message with us today.

These texts this morning share with us the story of two men—Ahaz king of Judah and Joseph the man engaged to Mary. Both were at a crisis time in their life—Ahaz because his country Judah was being severely threatened by the other countries around him, and Joseph because the woman he was engaged to was pregnant with a child that he knew was not his. Both were in trouble.

Have you ever felt backed into a corner when no easy solutions are in sight? Perhaps you are feeling that way today due to health reasons, financial conditions, relationship struggles or whatever it might be. My tendency when caught in any of these or other ways—and we all get caught at some time or another—is to look for a sign, any sign, that promises things will get better. I had a friend who in the midst of a severe storm would say “look to the

northwest, and when you see the smallest patch of blue sky, even though it’s raining cats and dogs where you are now, you can know that the storm will be ending.” Backed into a corner is where we find these two men this morning.

Both receive a sign and the sign that both Ahaz received, as well as Joseph, came unbelievably in the gift of a child! In Isaiah we read, “The Lord himself will give you a sign, ‘Look the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. Before the child is two years old the countries you fear will be destroyed.” And also, with Joseph, for when he learned Mary was pregnant, he had resolved to put her away quietly but was visited by an angel who said, “Joseph son of David do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you shall name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.”

Two men facing undesirable futures are asked to trust in the sign that they were given; a child being born that would foreshadow good things to come. Well, being given a sign and trusting that sign are two different things. King Ahaz’s knees buckled in the face of the storm in front of him and he opted not to trust the sign of the child and rather trust in himself. God’s sign was put aside and Ahaz chose to cast his lot with the Assyrians the very country that eventually destroyed his kingdom. Joseph on the other hand we are told when “he awoke from the sleep he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and he took Mary to be his wife.” And we will hear how that worked out this week.

It is difficult to trust in the face of internal or external pressure. That little patch of blue sky in the

northwest, or the promise that in the future things will work out can be hard to hold on to when facing what looks like extreme odds. And let's face it, it is hard to believe that the baby whose birth we will be celebrating is God's gift to us today molding and making us into people who can fear the difficult times of our lives and truly become a gift to those around us. Ahaz chose to go his own way and work things out by himself; Joseph chose to listen and bend his will into the will of God. Ahaz was not a gift to the people around him—Joseph stood quietly at Mary's side.

I said earlier that we are the gift that those around us want to receive this Christmas and in fact every day. What gift are we going to give them? The gift fashioned out of our own fearful, or clever, or manipulating, or controlling self? Or, will we trust that the Child to be born is God's answer for our needs, his gift of forgiveness and love to and for us so that we, in like manner, can pass this on as a gift to those around us?

Let's face it—we all need help. In our best days we fall short of being the full gift we could be to those around us. But as we now come to this celebration of The Gift of the Child, we can choose to accept the care and love God gives to us and not let that Gift just come to us but also flow through us to those around us. Faced with the gift of a child, both Ahaz and Joseph had choices to make and so do we. God came down so that we may have love, light, peace, and joy—may we receive these gifts and then share them freely with each other. In His name,  
Amen