

If “God is Love,” as the evangelist John claims (1 John 4:7), where do I see Love at work? How do we experience the divine?

Through Isaiah, God made his presence known to Ahaz. God’s intervention and challenge, unnoticed by Ahaz, was meant for a return to faith.

King Ahaz of Judah reigned during a tumultuous period, specifically from 735 to 720 BCE. Ahaz's reign was marked by a series of political and religious challenges that deeply influenced the people of Judah. His social, cultural and political decisions and military alliances had an impact they the faith of his kingdom and the broader narrative of Israel's history.

Ahaz ascended to the throne during a time of crisis for the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel had formed an alliance with Aram (Syria). King Ahaz faced immense pressure as these two powers invaded Judah, leading him to make a pivotal choice: rather than trusting in God for deliverance, he sought help from Tiglath-Pileser III, the king of Assyria. This decision to rely on a foreign power rather than divine intervention was one of the defining aspects of his reign and marked a shift in Judah's political and religious landscape.

Influenced by the Assyrians, Ahaz adopted their customs, which included idol worship and child sacrifice to the point of offering his own son as a burnt offering to the god Moloch.<sup>1</sup> He even reinstated the worship practices of the high places, which were condemned by previous kings.<sup>2</sup> This shift led to increased moral and spiritual decay within Judah and alienated the nation from the true worship of God, causing a rift that would have consequences for generations to come.

His alliance with Assyria, reliance on foreign gods, and embrace of idolatry led to dire repercussions for Judah, ultimately contributing to its downfall. Ahaz's actions serve as a cautionary tale about the dangers of compromising faith for political gain. His story is a reminder of the importance of steadfastness in one's convictions and trust in divine guidance during turbulent times.

In the book of Isaiah, we see the interaction between Ahaz and the prophet. Faced with the threat from the North (Israel and Aram), Ahaz was in panic mode. But God was willing to protect Judah. God commanded Isaiah to deliver a message of hope to Ahaz: "Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint..." (Isaiah 7:4)

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings 16:3

<sup>2</sup> [Topical Bible: High Places and Altars](#)

Consequently, Isaiah encouraged Ahaz to ask for a sign to confirm God's loyalty, but the king's heart was corrupted. He refused, claiming with false piety that he did not want to test and offend the Lord.

Isaiah responded with a prophetic message declaring that a sign would be given, nonetheless: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (a name that means God-with-us)" (Isaiah 7:14). God will remain with the people no matter what! The cruelest king ever is mentioned in Jesus' genealogy as a link to the people's salvation nevertheless and as a sign of God's mysterious ways.<sup>3</sup>

While Luke portrays Jesus' birth through Mary's experience, Matthew chooses to tell the story from Joseph's perspective.

As he weaves his narrative, Matthew states quite simply that Mary was "found with child through the Holy Spirit." Could he have been any more low-key in announcing the Incarnation? Yet, those are the simple words he uses.

By Joseph's account, at this point Mary was simply pregnant, and had no knowledge of the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Assuming Mary was unfaithful, Joseph planned to quietly end their engagement (i.e., divorce her) without causing her

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 1:9

harm. Matthew describes Joseph's intentions as righteous (verse 19), highlighting his wisdom, kindness, and ethical behavior that exceeded simple adherence to justice or the Law.<sup>4</sup>

Joseph risked his own reputation and standing within the community. He accepted the possibility of judgment from others, sacrificing social approval to act with compassion and mercy. This decision demonstrated Joseph's willingness to bear emotional and social consequences out of love and righteousness.

I can only imagine his inner struggle and turmoil. At this point, Matthew introduces Isaiah's prophetic announcement about Emmanuel.

Matthew's Joseph collaborates with God. He knows God can be trusted: God is faithful and loyal, God with us, in solidarity and compassion. The love of God, the love which prompted God to create also moves God to be honest and true to us. God's love is dependable, persistent, sincere, nurturing, healing, sustaining, empathic and compassionate.

May we become more and more aware of God's presence in our life and rejoice in God's love for us. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 20:10