



*Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14; quoted in Matthew 1:23)*

*And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. (Luke 2:12)*

The newborn baby in the manger is God's sign to us that He is with us (*Immanuel*) and has come to save us at Calvary and make us His very own! We behold this sign through:

- Our ears, as we hear His Word read and proclaimed by pastors and sung by choirs, and the mutual conversation and consolation of our brothers and sisters in Christ;
- Our eyes, as we read His Word, and gaze on pieces of art depicting His incarnation, birth, earthly life and ministry, passion, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension;
- Our mouths, as we receive His Very Body and Blood in His Supper;
- Our hearts and minds as we receive God's gift to believe that all that He did, He did for us, because we truly matter to Him!

Note that the Holy Infant resting in a feeding trough is a sign not only to us, but to every individual, no matter how checkered his or her past. Consider King Ahaz (2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28), to whom God initially spoke the prophecy of the virgin birth. King Ahaz's reign was marred by the evil of his idolatry; he even sacrificed his sons to the Baals (2 Kings 16:3; 2 Chronicles 28:2). Yet, the promise was for him as well! And it was two-fold. First, the temporal promise of an earthly son who would become a godly king and under whose reign God's angel would strike down the enemy (2 Kings 18-19; 2 Chronicles 29-32). Second, the promise of the eternally begotten Son of God, who would take on human flesh to die on the Cross for the forgiveness of the sins of the world and rise again to defeat death and declare forgiven sinners right with the Father. Had King Ahaz repented of his sins and not rejected the promise, he too would have received God's forgiveness and the certain hope of eternal life in Him. And that is true for everyone today, as well. With repentance, there is forgiveness at the foot of the Cross, even for sins that attack the sanctity of life. And with forgiveness comes salvation and eternal life. Remember that we *all* have sinned and need a Savior. And we *all* matter to God, who sent Him to us, to be with us, and us in Him, into eternity.

As we behold the sign of the Holy Child of Bethlehem, we rejoice and join with the angels and the shepherds glorifying and praising Him. And we point our non-believing neighbors to that very same sign that God has given for them. In so doing, we pray that the Holy Spirit will use our witness to gift them with saving faith in the One who has come to redeem them and make them His own.

Your English District Lifeline team thanks God for your proclamation of the Savior Jesus and prays His richest Christmastide blessings and peace on you, your families, and your congregations.