

When the People Shake, God is With Us

Crieff, 20 July, 2025 © Scott McAndless – Baptism

[Isaiah 7:1-7, 10-16](#), Psalm 78:1-7

I want to start out today by acknowledging the incredible gift that Erin and Bryce have given to us today. They have allowed us the wonderful privilege to be a part of their celebration of this most amazing and wonderful thing that has happened to them: the birth of their son.

We have all been given the privilege of participating in this very personal and family event. They have chosen to share it, not only with the church where Bryce is a member, Knox Crieff, but all four of our congregations today. We all get to be part of it. Isn't that simply amazing?

And the best thing about all of that is that this is not just a personal celebration, or a family celebration, nor even a single congregational celebration. We have been privileged to be part of a cosmic and world-changing event that is meant to give us all hope.

The Opening Scene

Let me explain what I mean by taking us into the opening scene of our reading from the Prophet Isaiah this morning. Our reading opens with a whole bunch of names and places that I realize don't mean a thing to any of you. One king makes an alliance with another king and together they decide to go up and attack another king. It all sounds serious but, who cares, since we don't know any of these people or places.

So let us put it in terms that maybe we can relate to. In the days of Carney, son of Carney son of Carney, Prime Minister of Canada, Israel and America went up to bomb Iran but did not conquer it and Netanyahu was bombing the people of Gaza. And Ukraine and Russia were sending squadrons of deadly drones against each other.

An epidemic of measles was quickly spreading across the land, and tariffs were causing economic turmoil. The forests were on fire and the rivers were rising in deadly flood. **“And the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.”**

Why Their Hearts were Shaking

Does that sound a little bit more relevant? Does that make a little bit more sense and do you understand why the heart of the people was shaking? Everywhere you look these days it seems as if things are falling apart. Things that we once took for granted – things that made us feel safe and prosperous – just no longer seem reliable.

So, the people are shaking and the king, Ahaz, is trembling. No one quite seems to know what to do. I don't know about you, but just about every time I look at news these days, there seems to be something that sets my heart to shaking like the trees of the forest shake before the wind.



And, on top of everything else, the church – which is supposed to give us a grounding and foundation in our lives so that we are not shaking – is going through times of difficult change which are disturbing.

A Message of Hope

And, amid all that shaking, God sends the Prophet Isaiah to the king with a message of hope. Oh, Isaiah admitted that things looked troubling but insisted that shaking was not in order. He said that the people threatening them were like **“two smoldering stumps of firebrands”** – that it was all smoke but little fire.

But things were going so badly that the king was unconvinced. So, Isaiah went on to offer him something that would convince him. **“Ask a sign of the LORD your God;”** he said, **“let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.”** Ask God to do something – anything – to prove it to you, the prophet invited him.

But I guess that the king was too discouraged because he refused to even ask for a sign. **“I will not ask,”** he insisted, **“and I will not put the LORD to the test.”** So, Isaiah did something extraordinary. He said, **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.”**

The Sign

And that brings us directly to why we are here today. What is the sign that God offers? **“Look,”** Isaiah says, pointing no doubt at the thing that the king is supposed to look at. **“Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.”**

Apparently, Isaiah is pointing at a young woman who is there with the king’s entourage. Perhaps she is one of the king’s new young wives. He points at this woman with a growing belly, and he makes the bold but not particularly wild prediction that her pregnancy will lead to the birth of a child. And the child will be the sign given to the king by God.

And how, exactly, is the birth of this child going to be a sign from God that we should not lose heart despite all that’s happening in the world? For that, we look to the name of this child. **“The young woman... shall name him Immanuel.”** And “Immanuel” is a Hebrew word that means “God is with us.” So, this young child is a sign from God which means that God is with us.

Matthew’s Use of This Verse

This was a message given to that king at that moment when the hearts of the people were shaking. Isaiah was speaking about a child who would soon be born and would be a sign of hope.

And I realize that Christians, as soon as they read that verse, lose sight of that original setting. We have been told every Christmas of our lives that that verse is only about the birth of Jesus – that Jesus was born of a virgin and that he and he alone is the one whose birth means that God is with us.

That is, of course, because the Gospel of Matthew interprets this prophecy of Isaiah as being about Jesus. And, let me be clear here, Matthew is not wrong!

Jesus is the one whose birth brings us hope and he – in his own body – has shown us what it means that God is with us more clearly than anyone who has ever lived. He was also born of a

virgin – which was not the word that Isaiah used when he spoke to the king, but it got translated that way in the Bible that Matthew was using when he wrote his Gospel.

Something that Continues to Happen

But just because Matthew's application of this prophecy to Jesus is correct, that doesn't mean that Isaiah wasn't talking about a young woman who was present that day. He clearly was. What Matthew's insight actually tells us is that there was something eternal about Isaiah's prophecy that day. He was also talking about something that would continue to happen over and over again.

And that is what we are here celebrating today, because what Isaiah said, I'm here to tell you today that it *has* happened again. God has spoken to us today even as we are shaking like the trees in the forest before the wind because of all that is going on in the world. God has spoken to us in the same way – a young woman has conceived and borne a son and she and her husband have brought him to us today as a sign.

Why Denny is a Sign

How exactly is Denny a sign for us? In so many ways. He is a sign because he is new life in a world where there is too much death these days. He is new life for the church, a sign that God will continue to bring children and young people into our churches as we act in faith and minister to them in trust.

He is also a message to us in the same way that a newborn child was in Isaiah's time. One thing Isaiah was trying to do was give them some perspective on the disasters they were obsessing over.

Isaiah goes on to say this about the child who was to be born: **“He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.”** That is just a fancy way of saying that the child will grow up and by the time he gets to a certain age, the threat they're all worried about will have disappeared.

Perspective on Troubling Events

What that means in terms that we might understand today is that Denny is going to grow up. Before long he will begin to walk and talk and try different foods and do all kinds of things. It will go by so fast. And when he does grow up all the things and people and political leaders we are so worried about right now will be gone.

This is a truth that I have observed repeatedly throughout my life. There are always things to be anxious about. This is true in our personal lives, in the church and on the world political stage. But the things that we get hung up over almost never turn out as we fear.

Yes, they may turn out differently and still be bad. And once the present threats have disappeared, no doubt something new will come along. I'm not promising that everything's going to go great. But what I'm saying is, let's not waste any energy fearing specific scenarios that we can't do anything about and that might never come to pass. Denny is a promise that the world will change in unexpected ways and sooner than we think. There is comfort in realizing that.

A Sign of God's Salvation

But, more than anything else, I believe that Denny is a message to us today that God is with us. God is reaching out to save us, and we have baptized him because we believe that God has anointed him to do that for us.

I'm going to speak directly to Denny here, if you don't mind. You're welcome to listen in. I know he may not remember what I say, but I'm going to give him a copy of my words so that he can keep them.

Denny, we have baptized you here today because we believe that there is incredible potential in you to bring hope and life and new beginnings to our world so that the whole world may know that God is with us.

Unlimited Potential

I do not know how you will do that. We celebrate newborns because we know that their potential is unlimited. That is true of every child, but I hope you don't mind if I say that my expectations are particularly high for you.

For one thing, look at this incredible family you have been born into. I know you don't know this yet, but your mother is not just the person who gave you life, she is a brilliant scientist and public health doctor who is working to protect the people of Hamilton Region (and we who live nearby too) from the spread of devastating diseases. She is the kind of hero that we need these days, and I believe that her role is only going on get more crucial.

And as for your father, he is not just *your* hero. He is a dedicated educator who is doing his best to prepare our young people for some of the significant challenges that we know they will face in the years to come. Where would we be without people like him?

So, if you were to follow in the footsteps of either of your parents, you would definitely be a sign of God's presence among us. But the amazing thing is that you don't even have to do either of those things. You can take all the gifts and abilities and wisdom they share with you and set your own course.

An Act of Faith

We have baptised you today as an act of faith that, whatever course you eventually take, it is going to be amazing. We'll all be looking forward to seeing what you do, and we have all promised – and especially the people of Knox Crieff have promised – that we will do whatever we can to encourage and support that amazing outcome.

And Denny, your great gift to us today is that you have allowed us to be part of the beginning of the amazing journey that lies before you. Thank you, and all thanks be to God!