

# A SIGN FOR AHAZ

## ISAIAH 7:10-16

In verse 14 Isaiah pens, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

In my library at home I have a book entitled, “Why Do Clocks Run Clockwise and Other Imponderables.”

If you have an inquisitive mind... If it’s hard for you to say the words, “*I don’t know*”... If you hate to admit that you're stumped... then you will love this book.

Its author, David Feldman and his research staff, answers 232 bizarre and baffling “*mysteries*.”

Feldman calls them “*imponderables*.”

Here's a sample of the questions tackled in the book:

Why don't people get goose bumps on their faces?

How do cereal manufacturers keep raisins from falling to the bottom of the cereal boxes?

Why, in any box of assorted chocolates, are the caramels always square, the nougats rectangular, the nuts oval, and the creams always circular?

Why are there 18 holes on a golf course?

Why do donuts have holes?

Why do you have to dry-clean raincoats?

How and why do horses sleep standing up?

Why can't hair grow on a vaccination mark?

Why are the flush handles on a toilet always on the left side? Hey, if you've ever asked any of these questions get the book. It provides you the answers.

Yet Feldman admits there are some imponderables - that despite his extensive research - remain a riddle.

These expert-stumpers he calls, "**frustratables.**"

And in my opinion the Bible is full of "*frustratables.*"

If I were putting together a list here's what I would include... The triune nature of God. How He can be three yet one... Creation "*ex nihilo*" - "*out of nothing...*"

The parting of the Red Sea... The manna from heaven... The long day of Joshua... Jesus' multiplying the loaves and fish... and walking on water... and raising Lazarus... Jesus' resurrection and ascension...

Folks have pondered these events for centuries, yet they remain as mysterious now as when they occurred.

And there's one biblical "*Imponderable*" - a true "*Frustratable*" - that stretches the limits of our logic further than all the others... We come face to face with it each Christmas - **It's the miracle of the virgin birth.**

How could a woman - no matter how fertile her womb - bear a child having never had sexual relations?

The great Reformer, Martin Luther, once wrote (*in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner*), "The incarnation consists of three miracles: The first that God became man - the second, that a virgin was a mother - and the third, that the heart of man should believe this."

Even with the tremendous advances in the field of reproductive science: *fertility drugs, in vitro fertilization, test tube babies, cloning, etc.* - nothing even remotely helps us explain the mechanics of the virgin birth.

The advances in obstetrics are marvelous, but they're all explicable, at least to an educated mind. But the virgin birth is not just *marvelous* - it's *miraculous!*

When we see a wide receiver dive and catch a ball most players can't reach - or a basketball player make an off-balanced shot - we call it a miracle... *but it's not.*

We undergo a medical procedure that 50 years ago was unimaginable. We'll call it "*a miracle,*" but technically it's not... A new gizmo gets labeled, "*a miracle,*" but in the truest sense of the word it's not.

A real miracle is a phenomenon that's impossible to explain in scientific terms. It goes beyond the *scope of science*. It can't be replicated in a petrie dish, or studied under a microscope. A genuine miracle is an event that depends on God's direct intervention!

The truly miraculous are not just improvements in technology, or breakthroughs in science. A real miracle usurps natural laws to accomplish Divine purposes.

Miracles baffle the intellect. They drive us to our knees. We're forced to face our limits. They bring us to the *brink of understanding* and the *beginnings of faith*.

The inquisitive, technical, mechanical, analytical mind must *give up* in the face of a genuine miracle.

One can never *figure out* what only *faith* can grasp.

Tertullian, the second century Latin apologist, once commented, "[I believe because it is absurd...](#)"

It was the fact that he couldn't figure it all out - *the power of God, the person of Jesus, the claims of Christianity...* that's what drew him to Christian faith.

And I agree. If God's ways can be deciphered by my little pea brain, He's not much of a God! If God can't frustrate my thinking, He's not a God worth serving!

Philosopher, Dr. Mortimer Adler, became a Christian at the age of 82. He made the following comment...

"I believe Christianity is the only logical, consistent faith in the world. But there are elements to it that can only be described as mystery... My chief reason for choosing Christianity was because the mysteries were incomprehensible. What's the point of revelation if we can figure it out ourselves? If it were wholly comprehensible it would be just another philosophy."

A miracle puts my whole life in perspective.

A miracle reminds me who God is, and who I am.

Up against a miracle my wisdom appears so naïve - my intellectual prowess seems so shallow - my mental powers so weak - *while God appears more Godlike!*

Christmas is a time for humbling our *hearts* and our *heads*, and marveling at a miracle! *A virgin conceived!*

"*The Word*" was made flesh. Or as the Greeks called it, "*the Logos*" - the ultimate reason behind life - was revealed in skin, and blood, and bone. As the scientists call it today, "*the unified theory*" or "*the theory of everything*" was revealed in a man named Jesus.

God added humanity to His deity. He became a man.

Think of it, the *ancient of days* became a *child of time*. The *infinite* became an *infant*. *The Creator a kid!*

*How did it happen?* Well, the details are sketchy, but here's what we know, "The Spirit of God overshadowed a virgin's womb. The seed of the spiritual impregnated a human egg. The Divine seed planted into human soil.

The human and divine mingled, and blended, and became one... It was a miracle of the highest order!"

And that's as far as I go. To me, it's inappropriate to probe any further. Here we stand on holy ground.

Remember, from a blazing bush on the side of Mount Sinai, God told Moses, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place you stand is holy ground." Well, the virgin birth is another reason to slip off your sandals.

It's not for us to scrutinize this divine mystery.

We need to stand in awe of God's omnipotence and wisdom. Christmas is not a time to be analytical or technical. Christmas is *a time to gawk at God!*

The angel knew Joseph was a man of faith. Jesus' foster father didn't need an explanation to believe. All he needed was a reminder of God's promise...

After the angel's visit to Joseph, the Gospel writer, Matthew, puts it into context. Matthew 1:22 tells us...

“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying (then he quotes Isaiah 7:14): “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, “God with us.”

Seven centuries before Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, His miraculous conception was spoken of by the Hebrew Prophet Isaiah.

Originally, the promise of Immanuel was to the Kings of Judah, of which Ahaz was a representative. At the time of Ahaz, Judah was under attack by several invading armies. And King Ahaz was petrified, horrified.

It was the prophet Isaiah who reassured Ahaz that God was in control... God would deliver His people!

And to confirm it, King Ahaz could ask for a sign.

Here in 7:10 we read, “Moreover the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, “Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.” *Ask God to do something supernatural to confirm His promise...* this is an amazing command!

God is going to assure Ahaz of His deliverance with a sign of the king's own choosing. He can ask for the most outlandish sign imaginable, *and God will do it!*

If this offer was made to you, what *imponderable* or *frustratable* would you choose? *Cause the moon to brush the Earth? Roll back the clock? Rewrite the Tech game so Georgia's kick-off goes out of the end zone?*

**“But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!”** We learn from Ahaz' track record that this was false humility. He'd already decided to strike an alliance with the Assyrians. The king had more faith in his political maneuvers than in the power of his God.

This offer of a sign must've pricked his conscience.

God wanted to prove Himself and His faithfulness to Ahaz, while the king was already leaning far from God.

So, since Ahaz refused to name a sign, God does it for him. **“Then he (Isaiah) said, “Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign...”** And notice Isaiah takes this matter of a sign beyond the current, local situation.

The immediate politics provoked the prophecy, but it's as if God knew it would be wasted on Ahaz, so He broadens its implications to *the whole house of David*.

The sign Isaiah reveals will speak not only to King Ahaz, but it'll be a sign to all the kings of the Davidic dynasty, and to all generations of the tribe of Judah.

And what God chooses as a sign is far more bizarre than anything Ahaz - or us - could've dreamed up.

Isaiah writes in verse 14, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel...” or “God with us!” What a sign indeed!

If God can cause a virgin name Mary to conceive a Son, then there's no question he can get King Ahaz and Judah out of hot water with their enemies.

Be aware that in Isaiah 7:14 the Hebrew term translated “*virgin*” is the word “*almah*.” And there are skeptics who'll say “*almah*” doesn't necessarily mean “*virgin*.” It can mean “a young girl of marriageable age.”

That is true... but often, the word does mean “*virgin*.”

In fact, “*almah*” appears seven times in the OT. And in four of the seven passages the context is without a doubt speaking of a girl who has never had sexual relations with a man. The three other uses of the word are less clear, but also probably refer to virgin girls.

Besides, this birth was “*a sign*” to Ahaz. And what kind of a sign is it for a young woman of marriageable age to birth a child? That was an everyday occurrence.

A sign is an extraordinary event. It attracts attention.  
It indicates that God is up to something special...

All doubt about the meaning of the word “**almah**” was eliminated in 270 BC when the OT was translated into Greek - a translation known as the Septuagint.

The Septuagint renders the Hebrew word “**almah**” with the Greek word “**parthenos**” - which is a strong term. It’s an unequivocal reference to a genuine virgin.

*And here’s the icing on the cake!* When Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14, and records it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he also uses the word “**parthenos.**”

Obviously, when both Isaiah and Matthew wrote a “**virgin**” - a true virgin girl is exactly what they meant.

Isaiah continues to write of “**Immanuel**” in verse 15, “**Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.**”

Curds and honey were baby food. Thus, Isaiah is saying before this miraculous, virgin-born child reaches adulthood, Judah’s northern neighbors, Syria and Israel will no longer be a serious military threat.

*It would be 730 years before the child of this prophecy was even born. Yet if Jesus had been born that very day the timeframe would've still been valid.*

A Jewish boy celebrated his **bar-mitzvah**, or his passage from childhood into adulthood, at age 12. In a little less than a dozen years the Assyrians had wiped out both Syria and Israel. Both enemies were toppled.

Of course, some folks ask, *“How can an event 730 years in the future be a sign to a man in the present?”*

Well, the point of Isaiah’s prophecy was to introduce Ahaz and the nation Judah, to this person, **“Immanuel.”**

He’d be born of a virgin seven centuries in the future, but Jesus was active at that moment. God’s Son was Immanuel from the dawn of time, not just at His birth.

In the OT, Immanuel appeared at various times and for various reasons. Here, He comes to defend Ahaz.

In Isaiah 8 we learn that it was Immanuel who drew a sword and fended off the invading armies of Assyria.

The Immanuel who was later born in Bethlehem had been active in the life of the nation 700 years earlier. While the sign that demonstrated *who Immanuel really was* and *what He’d really come to do* wouldn’t be revealed until the virgin had conceived and bore a Son.

There are other OT passages that affirm God's promise of the Savior's virgin birth. The miracle is spoken of in several places... Genesis 3 anticipates the ultimate conflict between *the Savior* and *Satan*.

God speaks to the serpent in verse 15... "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." Hostility will exist between Eve's offspring and Satan's offspring. Satan will bruise Eve's Son, but He in turn will crush Satan.

This occurred on the cross. In essence, Jesus got a nasty heel bruise, while Satan got his skull crushed.

Yet notice, the wording in Genesis 3. It refers to Jesus as "the seed of the woman." This is the only time in Scripture which speaks of a woman possessing a seed... The man supplies the seed, not the woman.

Obviously, Genesis 3:15 is predicting some kind of miracle - a unique, and special, and supernatural birth.

Also consider Jeremiah 31:22, "For the LORD has created a new thing in the earth - a woman shall encompass a man." The Hebrew rabbis, writing before the coming of Jesus, understood this verse to refer to the birth of a son by supernatural means. One rabbi explained it, "Messiah is to have no earthly father."

Another rabbi stated, "The birth of Messiah will be without defect. The birth of the Messiah will be like that of no other man." And a third rabbinical interpretation, "The birth of Messiah will be like the dew of the Lord as drops on the grass without the action of a man."

All three interpretations strike a similar chord. Jewish scholars before Jesus recognized that the Prophet Jeremiah predicted Messiah would be born of a virgin.

Understand too, the virgin birth is not only predicted in the OT, it's a crucial, essential teaching in the NT.

If Jesus of Nazareth was the bastard child of Mary's infidelity - or even the legitimate offspring of her marriage to Joseph - there would be no salvation.

Jesus would be a mere mortal - a common sinner - guilty Himself - and unable to die for you and me.

Sin is inherent. It gets passed down. Every person is born with a nature that's stubborn and rebellious. **It's not our sin that makes us a sinner. We're a sinner because of our sin.** Humans are selfish from the womb.

Romans 5 teaches that the first Adam acted for all humanity - so that the last Adam, Jesus, could save all who would trust in Him. **One man acts for all men.**

The Bible makes a big deal that sin passes from Adam, not Eve. It's the father's bloodline that's stained.

The reason we're *born into sin* and *wicked from the womb* is because of our *distant daddy*, Adam.

This is why the Virgin Birth is a necessity. Since Joseph was not His blood relative, Jesus avoided the inherent sin from Adam. Jesus received His humanity from Mary, but His spiritual nature came from God.

Jesus might've inherited Mary's Jewish nose, or her black wavy hair, but He was born with a divine nature.

In Jesus, God became flesh. He was born sinless.

If Jesus had been born in sin - even if He'd lived a perfect life afterwards - He still would've died for His own sin, not ours. To die a substitutionary death, Jesus had to be guiltless **not only from birth, but in birth!**

The miracle that occurred in the womb of the young maiden enabled Jesus to be as human as his mother Mary, yet as sinless and divine as God in heaven.

Understand, the Virgin Birth and the Deity of Jesus are the underpinnings of all Christian theology. These are not optional doctrines. They're absolutely essential.

Kick out the cornerstones and the whole house caves in. Without these points of faith all Christianity becomes a *"house of cards."* Without the Virgin Birth, Jesus is not the *God-man* - rather, He's a *con-man*.

Our salvation becomes a sham. Never mind *“peace on earth, good will toward men...”* Forget Christmas is for kids... Ignore Christmas cheer and charity... there's *no reason for the season* if Jesus is not virgin born.

Without the virgin birth, Jesus isn't who He says He is - and He's unable to do what He says He does.

Years ago I watched a Christmas special on television. It was a fun-filled variety show hosted by Casey Kasem. But in his closing comments he made the statement, *“Christmas use to be for Christians who worshipped Jesus, but today Christmas is for everyone who wants peace on earth and good will toward men.”*

His statement almost gave me a heart attack. I choked on my eggnog. It certainly ruined the show!

*I couldn't have disagreed more!* The foundation of Christmas and Christianity are identical. It wasn't just any baby... it was **God in the Bethlehem manger!**

If it were just another child Mary laid in the hay, then the world is no better off than it was before His birth.

*“Peace on earth, good will toward men”* is just a pipe dream. Christmas without the Virgin Birth, and Deity of Jesus, might still be used as an excuse for people to *party*, but it would no longer be a reason to *praise!*

The *holiday* we call “*Christmas*” would become a *hollow-day*, not a *holy-day*... And this is why Satan has worked so *hard* for so *long* to attack this doctrine...

Satan's strategy is twofold... He encourages us to **doubt** the truth of the Virgin Birth and the Deity of our Lord Jesus... *And if he's unsuccessful with doubt...*

He tries to **distract** us. If he can get us caught up in stuff we'll never consider the implications of the truth.

Even in Jesus' day Satan tried to stir up **doubts** about the Savior's birth. In the Gospels, the Jews tried to drape a shroud of suspicion over Jesus' parentage.

Once, their leaders were boasting that Abraham was their father. They believed *heaven was earned by heredity*. But Jesus sets the record straight, if Abraham was their spiritual father they would mimic his faith.

And the Jews retaliated with a low blow. In John 8:41 they sneer, "**We were not born of fornication; we have one father - God.**" Notice, their evil insinuation - they were suggesting Jesus was born of illegitimate birth.

Jesus goes on to tell the Jewish leaders that God is His Father, and their father is the devil. But obviously, Satan tried his best to attach a sinful stigma to the birth of Jesus even from the beginnings of Christianity.

Another attack was launched on the nature of Jesus later in the first century by a heretical cult called the Gnostics. Even today, Gnostic writings like the [Gospel of Thomas](#), and the [Gospel According to Judas](#) get featured in the secular press to contradict Christianity.

You're never told that these extra-biblical books were both known by the early church and strongly rejected.

In fact, much of the NT is aimed at defending Christian faith against Gnosticism. The term "[Gnostic](#)" is from the Greek word "[gnosis](#)" or [knowledge](#). It's a heresy that claims to possess a special knowledge.

In short, the Gnostics believed God reveals Himself in the form of pixie dust - and is sprinkled throughout the universe. **A little of God is in all things...** *in holy men of ages past - in the angels - in the mountains - in the animals - in clouds - in plants - even in man...*

God is everywhere, in everything. God is sprinkled as divine pixie dust all across the vast universe.

Thus, the Gnostics taught that there was nothing unique about Jesus. He was just one of God's many revelations... A way to God, but not THE way to God.

Similar to what New Agers teach today.

Yet the apostles and the early church stood staunchly against this heresy. In Colossians 2:9 Paul takes aim at Gnosticism. He writes, "For in Him (in Jesus) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily..."

In other words, God is no pixie dust. He isn't the scattered pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle. His essence, His being, isn't sprinkled throughout the universe.

The totality of God resides in one human body!

Imagine, all of God - the Creator, the Almighty who overflows all universes - somehow compressed, and compacted, and capsulated into a tiny baby's body.

That means, if you want to find the revelation of God to man there's only one place to look. God has placed all the eggs of incarnation in one basket - *or better yet, in one manger!* All that God wanted to say to you and me about Himself and about life, He's said in Jesus!

That first Christmas morning in Bethlehem do you think anyone grasped the significance that the Eternal God - the God who shares His glory with no one - the God Who is so holy no man is allowed before Him uninvited - *that same God lay sleeping in the straw?*

Satan encourages **doubt** - but when doubt fails, he tries to **distract**. Here is a sly maneuver! What's the difference between *doubting a truth* and simply *ignoring it*?

Practically speaking if you believe in the Virgin Birth and Deity of Christ - yet ignore it - are you any better off than the man who doesn't believe at all?

*Neither person worships... neither bothers to obey... neither the doubter or ignorer really loves the Lord...*

If Satan can't get you to doubt the truth of Christmas, the next best thing for him is to get you to ignore it.

And I'm always surprised at how successful Satan is at creating this indifference at Christmas - *the one time of the year when our devotion should be at its peak.*

Too often, folks act like the inhabitants of Bethlehem that first Christmas morning. *God was in the manger* but they were too busy with life to go and worship Him.

This Christmas will be different at the Adams' house.

There's been a loss in our family. Every year Kathy decorates, and fills our house with Christmas cheer.

And the centerpiece of our decorations is the nativity set that sits on the mantle in our living room. There's a ceramic Joseph, Mary, shepherds and sheep, even a cow or two. And then there's a little manger and baby.

*But this year it's different.* There's been a loss. Kathy announced that we've lost baby Jesus! When I heard the news I was stunned. *How do you lose Jesus?*

Now every time I sit down in the living room I have a hollow feeling - *what's a nativity set without Jesus?*

Joseph, Mary, the shepherds... *who cares?* It's not right without Jesus at the center - it's not Christmas.

The other day it hit me! Our loss of Jesus wasn't a sudden disaster, we've been negligent for years. It's just finally caught up to us. When my boys re-enact the story each year, that ceramic baby gets tossed around.

Last year the grandkids got in on the action. With four toddlers around who knows where Jesus went?

We haven't been as cautious as we should've been, and now *we've finally lost Him!* And what happened to our ceramic baby Jesus, can happen to the real Jesus.

As the years go by, we can become neglectful.

Don't get so use to the storyline that you lose the wonder and delight that should accompany Christmas.

That baby is divine! His conception was a miracle.

Jesus should be bowed before and worshipped, not just tossed around. As the years go by be careful you don't neglect Him - or misplace Him - and lose Jesus...

One year, I was browsing the public High School's December calendar. It listed some pretty mundane events... *the day for soccer physicals, a teacher's work day, a Dugout Club meeting*, but the 25<sup>th</sup> of December was conspicuously blank. Imagine, it's okay to mention a Dugout Club meeting, but not Jesus' birthday?

It's no secret our secular world has taken Christ out of Christmas, *but what about us? We who affirm our faith in the doctrine, are we any different in practice?*

Author Joseph Stowell writes these probing words, "Many of us have found our sensitivities insulted and our convictions offended as court rulings removed the nativity scenes from the lawns of our city halls.

It's far easier to object to that swipe of secularism than to realize that for years many of us have been living through the Christmas season with, figuratively, no nativity scene on the front lawn of our lives.

Caught up in the swirl and storm of the holiday, who of us has taken the time to proclaim Jesus...?"

Our Christmas celebrations include *parties and presents* - but what about *praise and proclamation?*

Though *the mechanics* of this miracle were imponderable, its *meaning* was crystal clear. The Virgin Birth means the baby Mary laid in the manger is God!

Thus, every Christmas should be a time of **worship**.

Here's a holiday that demands we slow down, and carve out time to think... Christmas requires that I contemplate a miracle - that I allow myself to be smitten all over again with wonder and amazement and awe over an event I can't fully decipher or understand.

We need to let the force of the Christmas miracle whittle away at our *high-mindedness* and *haughtiness*.

Christmas reminds me that *I don't know it all*.

It's the *holiday* that *humbles me*.

This year, let the miracle of Jesus' birth bring you back to a simpler faith - *faith, though you can't see - faith, though you could never figure it all out...*

To be brought to my knees in simple faith and absolute trust, is good, good medicine for my soul!

Being *baffled* once a year can be a *blessing...*

We spend so much time throughout the year questioning... *Why did God do this? Or allow that?*

Christmas reels in my curiosity. It reminds me that God owes no one an explanation. His ways and His wisdom call for us to bow before His omnipotence.

Christmas encourages me to rest *my probing mind* in *God's loving arms*. I have a motto I picked up several years ago. It reads, "I love God because I know Him. I adore Him, because I cannot comprehend Him."

Christmas is a time to *ponder and praise* - **to gawk at God**. It's a time to realize the glory and grandeur of the God we serve! Every year at Christmas time we find ourselves once again standing on holy ground.

Christmas is a time to **worship**, but it's also a time to **witness**. Despite the distractions Satan manufactures at Christmas, it's still the one big time of the year when people are inclined to think about religious themes.

It's when hearts soften, and spiritual-sensitivities heighten. At Christmas *the hardest sinner* will often *consider the Savior*. It's been said, "The fact remains, our world never comes as close to being in contact with its greatest hope as it does at Christmas time."

You and I need to be aware that the *Spirit of Christ* still takes advantage of the *spirit of Christmas*.

This is a time of year to go on the offensive. At Christmas we need to declare to the world that heaven has invaded earth - *that God can be met in a manger!*

*At work... at the office party... with the relative that never wants to hear... the neighbor you've been praying for... this is a time to be bold. Invite them to our Christmas Eve service! Don't shy away from Jesus.*

It was on the first Christmas Eve that shepherds out in the fields of Bethlehem, were suddenly visited by angels announcing the news that Messiah was born.

They ran to find and worship the newborn king.

Afterwards Luke 2:17 says of these shepherds, "Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child." And Here's our Christmas commission in a nutshell, "*they made widely known the saying.*" Let's do the same!

Christmas is for *worship* and *witness*. It's for *taking time to think* - and then *taking the time to speak up*.

Remember, God dared King Ahaz to ask for a sign.

The king could've ask for any sign - a sign so outlandish no one would ever question God's faithfulness again. *And what a sign God gave him!...*

*"The virgin shall conceive and bear a Son..."* Here's a sign that shouldn't go unnoticed. Let's pay attention to this sign!... Adore the Christ this Christmas! Then like the shepherds make His coming widely known!