

The Isaiah Poems

Isaiah 7:10-16 | Advent 2016

PARTICIPANT SHEET #4 O, A Sign

ENTRY POINTS *By Janice MacLean*

There are many occasions for "O."
O for wonder and surprise.
O for hope and delight.
O for the breaking in of God among us.

"God spoke again to Ahaz. This time he said, "Ask for a sign from your God. Ask anything. Be extravagant. Ask for the moon!"

But Ahaz said, "I'd never do that. I'd never make demands like that on God!" (The Message)

Let's go back to the 8th Century, BCE. We have Ahaz, King of Judah. He is scared and with good reason. The countries to the North have formed an alliance threatening him. He made a deal with the Assyrians, which was a little like the mice asking the cat to protect them. And into the court of King Ahaz comes the prophet Isaiah, with the intention of offering the king the protection of God. "Ask for a sign. It can be this high or this deep."

Now Ahaz does what we might do when we are really, really afraid ... he pretends to be very brave and full of faith. "No, I won't ask God for a sign that would be testing God." And how often do we try to hide our fear and uncertainty behind a pious expression of faith?

The exasperated prophet offers a sign anyway. *"Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."*

Who was the pregnant young woman? It might have been Isaiah's wife. He tended to name his kids by the signs of God's actions he saw coming. This child soon to be born would see the coming of the Assyrians who ruthlessly destroy the walls of Jerusalem and burn the Temple. But the same child would eat curds and honey. This was the food of prosperous times, not the diet of war. So peace will come by the time the child is eating solid food.

Signs can be disturbing, often a little unsettling. "O" for wonder and surprise.

Matthew picks up on the sign centuries later: *'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 are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'* All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: *'Look, the virgin shall conceive and*

bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.

We can look for extraordinary signs of hope for our world –even ask for it -yet God's sign is most ordinary of all: **A young woman is with child.** As we get ready to enter the Mystery of Christmas, we are again encouraged to look for ordinary signs.

We look to power for strength in our world – our own personal version of the Assyrians - but God points to the most vulnerable: **A child is born.** As we get ready to enter the Mystery of Christmas, look for absurd signs. Look for unexpected signs in unusual places.

We look far and wide for a key to God's mystery, but God always points us home: the child is **called Immanuel: God-with-us!** (Adapted from UCC liturgy)