

## FIRST READING – A ADVENT 4

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying,  
“Ask a sign of the Lord your God;  
let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.”  
But Ahaz said, “I will not ask,  
and I will not put the Lord to the test.”  
Then Isaiah said:  
“Hear then, O house of David!  
Is it too little for you to weary the people,  
that you weary my God also?  
Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.  
Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son,  
and shall name him Emmanuel.”

Ahaz = AY-haz

Sheol = SHEE-ohl

Emmanuel = ih-MAN-yoo-el

Pause for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – A ADVENT 4

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

From Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ,  
called to be an Apostle,  
set apart for the gospel of God,  
which God promised beforehand  
through his prophets in the holy Scriptures:  
the gospel concerning his Son,  
who was descended from David according to the flesh  
and was declared to be Son of God with power  
according to the spirit of holiness  
by resurrection from the dead,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Through Christ we have received grace and apostleship  
to bring about the obedience of faith  
among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name,  
including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.  
To all God's beloved in Rome,  
who are called to be saints:  
Grace to you and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – A ADVENT 4

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

*Glory to you, O Lord*

The birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.  
When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph,  
but before they lived together,  
she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man  
and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace,  
planned to dismiss her quietly.  
But just when he had resolved to do this,  
an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,  
“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 fulfil 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.”  
When Joseph awoke from sleep,  
he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him;  
he took her as his wife.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

### Reading I: Isaiah 7:10-14

This text may be interpreted at two quite different levels; though, as we shall see, there is a real connection and continuity between the two.

First, there is the meaning of the text in its original historical situation. This situation is described in 2 Kgs 16:5-9. Syria has entered into an alliance with the northern kingdom of Israel against the southern kingdom of Judah, of which Ahaz is king. Together they have laid siege to Jerusalem.

Isaiah offers Ahaz a sign that everything will eventually turn out successfully, but Ahaz piously refuses such a sign, doubtless because he wants to have no truck with Isaiah's advice. But Isaiah goes on and gives the sign anyway:

“the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.”

It is probable that the young woman in question is the wife of the king, and the son to be born, Hezekiah. The sign, then, will concern the continuation of the Davidic dynasty, a sign that God is with God's people. This is the first level of meaning.

At the second level, the text is taken up by the evangelist Matthew and applied to the birth of Jesus. The Lucan infancy narrative also echoes it (see Lk 1:31), thus indicating that this application represents a tradition earlier than the two evangelists.

In the Septuagint translation used by the evangelists, “young woman” is rendered *parthenos* (“virgin”). In a sense, the resultant application of Is 7:14 is far removed from what the prophet originally intended—he was thinking only of the immediate political situation and of the certainty that God would shortly intervene on the side of Judah.

But in linking this assurance with the continuance of the Davidic line, Isaiah had expressed a hope that continued in Israel and that, for the Christian Church, found its final fulfillment in the birth of Christ from the Virgin Mary.

He is the true Emmanuel, God-with-us.

### Responsorial Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

In the Anglican liturgical tradition, this psalm is associated with Ascension Day, for which it is one of the proper psalms for the second Evensong of that feast.

It is equally suitable, however for Advent, for it is one of the psalms composed for the processional entry of the king into the temple.

In Christian usage, it can be applied either to the ascension, Christ's entry into heaven, or to the incarnation, his entry into the tabernacle of the flesh.

## Reading II: Romans 1:1-7

This is the opening greeting of Paul to the Romans. Nearly all his letters were written to churches he himself had founded, but Romans was an exception. It was written to a church founded by others, to prepare the way for a future visit by Paul (Rom 15:22-24). Part of its purpose was to acquaint the Christians in Rome with the Pauline version of the gospel.

Paul begins by sketching the gospel in a traditional form, in which we find a whole series of expressions not otherwise used in his letters:

descended from David  
according to the flesh  
declared to be (enthroned) Son of God with power  
according to the spirit of holiness.

Paul can safely assume that the Romans had heard of this or similar creedal statements and that they will see at once that he preaches the same faith they have received from others before him.

Later on, Paul will give another formulation of the gospel: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith” (Rom 1:16). This is not a different gospel but the same gospel stated in Paul’s own language.

Jesus himself had not called particular attention to his Davidic descent, though this was probably a family tradition. That would have suggested to his contemporaries a political conception of messiahship from which he was at pains to dissociate himself.

But the post-Easter community found it necessary in preaching to Israel to stress Jesus’ Davidic descent as a vital qualification for messiahship. Thus, it passed into the general stock of christological concepts.

Here it is used to stress the earthly side of Jesus’ history (“descended from David according to the flesh”) as contrasted with his exalted status after the resurrection (“declared to be Son of God ... by resurrection from the dead”). Thus, the Davidic descent of Jesus stresses, not his exalted majesty, but his terrestrial lowliness.

## Gospel: Matthew 1:18-24

In the New Testament, the supernatural conception of Jesus figures only in the two annunciation stories in Matthew and Luke. Apart from these two stories (with the possible exception of an editorial adjustment at the end of the Matthean genealogy, Mt 1:16, though the text here is uncertain), Jesus is represented as the son of Mary and Joseph, which is who he legally was.

It is remarkable that both Matthew and Luke, whose infancy stories are in most aspects poles apart from one another, agree that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, his mother remaining a virgin. Clearly the tradition is much earlier than either Matthew or Luke. But as to its ultimate origin, the historian can only conjecture.

The real question is what the evangelists intended to convey in this story. These stories are an affirmation of faith in the transcendental origin of Jesus' history.

He is not a product of human evolution, the highest achievement of humanity, but the intervention of the transcendent God in human history from outside. "The incarnation is like a dagger thrust into the web of human history" (Hoskyns).

To affirm the virginal conception is not merely to affirm a theological miracle (though that, no doubt, is presupposed by the evangelists), but to affirm the faith that the evangelists were affirming in narrating the annunciations.

Reginald H. Fuller