

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Signs from the Lord The Annunciation of the Lord Saturday, March 25, 2017
8:15 AM **Is 7:10-14; 8:10;** Heb 10:4-10; Lk 1:26-38 (There are so many signs of God's presence and God's love and God's attention to our needs, but we often dismiss them.)

“Ask for a sign from the Lord, your God, let it be deep as the nether world, or high as the sky!”

This is from chapter 7 of Isaiah. The careful reader might find a certain amount of ambiguity in these various Scripture passages because you will remember quite readily that in the gospel when the people asked for a sign, Jesus is very put off and he actually says something rather striking and judgmental. He says, “This is an evil age that asks for a sign.” That’s one context, the gospel. Here in the prophet Isaiah it’s turned around. **The prophet tells Ahaz to ask for a sign and Ahaz says, “I will not ask! I will not tempt the Lord!”** So what’s going on? Ahaz sees, believes, that **asking for a sign is challenging God, which is the very idea Jesus has as well**, that the people are asking for a sign because they don’t want to believe. They want something proved to them. And he is saying, “The only sign you will get is the sign of Jonah.” But here in a sense the tables are turned. So we always have to be careful of contexts. **Here the prophet really wants Ahaz to recognize that something new is happening.** Ahaz actually is in a place of, you could say, despair. Ahaz thinks that life is over, not only his life, but he really feels the life of the people is over. The time of Isaiah was a time of desperation, and **the prophet comes with hope.** Look, there’s hope here, so just ask for a sign and the Lord will show you and then you’ll know.

So there is a time for asking for a sign; and there is a time not for asking for a sign.

Actually **every day there are many signs.** It is we who have to open our eyes to see them. There are so **many signs of God’s presence and God’s love and God’s attention to our needs**, but we often dismiss gifts as if, well, that was lucky; oh that was a nice coincidence; oh isn’t it nice

that he just showed up; or isn't it great that I just got that letter in the mail with a check. **We don't see the divine providence working through everything. But then when we are really being asked to take a step in faith, then we feel abandoned.** How come God isn't helping me? So we can get spoiled by the many graces of God.

And God's point is not to spoil us. **God wants to show us love, but he also wants us to grow toward him,** just like a parent with a child. A parent loves a child, loves the first step of a baby, loves the first word. It's all wonderful, but no parent wants the child to stop there. But we tend to want to stop there when it comes to our spiritual growth. We tend to want to call it a day really early on. We tend not to want to take that second step and that third step and we tend not to want to learn how to speak full sentences. **When it comes to the word of God and the ways of God we tend to want to hold back.** We like being infants in the hands of God. And God is trying to say, well, that was nice, but now **you have to get going and move and grow and prosper and learn and see.** And that's not always what we want to do.

In the fullness of time God sent his very own Word, that means his understanding of who he is, into our human flesh. That Word never departed. **That Word is with us every day in every place at every moment. And that Word often approaches us in our own kind with both help and need. For those who know how to see, they are all signs from the Lord our God.**