Prophet
Isaiah 7:10-16

10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying,

11 Ask a sign of the Lord your God;
let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.

12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask,
and I will not put the Lord to the test.

13 Then Isaiah said:
'Hear then, O house of David!
Is it too little for you
to weary mortals,
that you weary my God also?

14 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 Immanuel.

15 He shall eat curds and honey
by the time he knows
how to refuse the evil
and choose the good.

16 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.

Gospel
Matthew 1:18-25

18 Now 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.

19 Her husband Joseph,
being a righteous man
and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace,
planned to dismiss her quietly.

20 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.

21 She will bear a son,
and you are to name him Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.'

22 All this took place
to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord
through the prophet:

23 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel',
which means, 'God is with us.' 2

4 When Joseph awoke from sleep,
he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him;
he took her as his wife,
25 but had no marital relations with her
until she had borne a son;
and he named him Jesus.

Reading the Prophet This Week

King Ahaz is father of reformer King Hezekiah,
late 700's BCE in Judah, after Israel fell to Assyria
Ahaz is playing Egypt off against Assyria, stuck in the middle
Hezekiah will fend off the last siege in 701BCE

The editor of the book says God offered a sign
Ahaz, still playing both sides, but playing pious, declines
Isaiah scolds the king for dithering
and gives him a sign anyhow.

What's the sign of v 14?
Imagine a young woman is pregnant now.
by the time she delivers, and weans the child,
who matures enough to know right from wrong
(how long is that?)
this nutcracker will be past.

That's giving a king mundane, stay-the-course advice,
not signs in the sky, or omens from ghosts or demons,
just reframing in human terms –
this too will pass –
will you be proud, or regretful

I still don't think
Isaiah simply predicted Jesus in v.14
come true 700 years later, once-for-all,
but that Jesus' re-presenting
from his birth to his adult ministry,
was like the framing of this prophecy

Immanuel, God with us,
neither up in heaven or down in Sheol,
closer to us than life,
is a common locating of the divine,
in Torah, in psalms, in prophets
and in church?

In case I can't duck it
what about 'virgin' in Isaiah 7:14?

the Hebrew is *'almah* –
used here and 6 more times in the Hebrew bible
Gen 24:43, Ex 2:8, Ps 68:26, Prov 30:19, Song 1:13, 6:8
How does your bible translate the other 6 times?

there is a Hebrew word unambiguously 'virgin': *betulah*
It shows up 50 times in the Hebrew bible – not here

So after Alexander the Great, we're all speaking Greek
(still in the market, even after Rome rules in Latin)
in Egypt we translate Septuagint ('the 70 books')
in the 200's BCE Torah and 100's BCE the rest
and Isaiah 7:14 comes out *parthenos*

Yes, 2000 years of Christians want a virgin Mary,
and we can go there in the second reading today,
but does the 'prediction' in 7:14 look like a miracle,
or a young woman conceiving in her womb and bearing,
then weaning, nurturing, till the child knows right and wrong?

It's 1910 before we get '5 fundamentals' of fundamentalism:
biblical inerrancy,
nature divine of Jesus Christ,
his virgin birth,
resurrection of Christ,
and his return.

That's not 'lower criticism' of word study,
but 'higher criticism' of interpretive lenses
fundamentalism resisting modernism
and our United Church comes out of the latter
including our Dr Fraser in Annan and Leith.

Reading the Gospel This Week

This is Matthew's year – imagine you only had this gospel
(Luke goes on a lot more about virginity)
You'd have a geneology in 3 flights of 14:
Abraham to David, David to Exile, Exile to Jesus
shaping history toward this next turning point.

Matthew's put you in a Jewish frame
(Luke's genealogy goes from Adam, all humans)
Jesus Messiah (*Iesou Christou)*

We get a social cultural distinction
between betrothal and marriage,
Mary and Joseph one but not the other yet
and 'found to be with child from the Holy Spirit'

We get righteous Joseph planning a choice
an angelic supernatural or psychological event
invoking Holy Spirit again

The divine messenger gives a common name,
with a vocation to save his people from their sins
not a universal promise, or a political one

The editorial voice then cites Isaiah 7:14,
parthenos straight out of Septuagint,
and asserts 'fulfillment'
a hallmark of Matthew you'll see all this year.
Joseph wakes, weds, but defers *eginōsken*
opening up centuries of talk of 'perpetual virginity'

You've already decided –
but if you decided as a child or an adolescent,
has your worldview about other stuff changed?
What's the meaning and message this year?

In case I can't duck it,
I'll offer you links to 'Baby Jesus in the Bible'
and at the church, audio CD's
so you can hear the 'lost gospels'
the versions that didn't get into our canon

Try www.hereticslikeus.com,
December 2019
http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2019/11/baby-jesus-in-my-bible.html

or for more fun,
December 2008
the infancy gospels that didn't make the cut:
http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2008/12/infancy-gospel-of-james.html?q=infancy+gospels

http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2012/12/infancy-gospel-of-thomas.html?q=infancy+gospels

Yes, this is irreverent,
toward fundamentalists,
and disillusioning
for children

but again,
what's the meaning and message
for you
this year
about Matthew's version
of Jesus' conception?