

■ The 116th Sharing of the Word

● First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14

Around 735 B.C., the so-called Syro-Ephraimite War broke out. The northern kingdom of Israel and Aram planned to overthrow the southern kingdom of Judah, ruled by King Ahaz, and to install another king in his place (Isaiah 7:6). God sent the prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz, who was filled with fear, and said to him, “Do not be afraid; this plan shall not succeed” (Isaiah 7:7-9). This passage follows that message.

However, Ahaz did not place his trust in God and instead relied on the power of Assyria (2 Kings 16:7-9). In response to this lack of faith, God spoke an exceptionally rare and powerful word of salvation: “My word will surely be fulfilled. Ask for a sign.” God even declared that He would provide any sign from the depths of Sheol (the realm of the dead) to the heights of heaven demonstrating that no realm and no miracle lay beyond His power. This was spoken in order to lead Ahaz to trust in God.

Yet Ahaz, pretending humility, replied, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.” In truth, this was a deceptive response that concealed his unwillingness to rely on God’s word. Since Ahaz was a descendant of the house of David, Isaiah addressed him saying, “Hear this, O house of David!” Isaiah’s frustration toward Ahaz’s double-mindedness is expressed as impatience with human beings, while the rejection of God’s faithfulness, love, and patience reveals God’s own grief toward humanity.

Even so, God gave a sign: “The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” This sign has two meanings.

First, in the time of King Ahaz, a child would be born whom the king would know, and before the child grew to maturity, the enemy nations would be destroyed (Isaiah 7:16).

Second, through the birth of Jesus, the words “Immanuel God is with us” are fulfilled (Matthew 1:22-23).

As you can see, this passage stands as a prophecy that bridges the Old Testament and the New Testament.

● Second Reading: Romans 1:1-7

Paul was originally an opponent of the teachings of Jesus. However, after encountering the risen Christ on the road to Damascus and acknowledging Him as Lord, Paul was sent by God as an apostle to the Gentiles. He wrote a letter to the believers in Rome to proclaim his mission and the gospel, and this passage comes from that letter.

The joyful message that through the “death and resurrection” of Jesus planned by God “eternal life” has been opened to all humanity is called the gospel, and it is the power that leads people to salvation. Paul was “chosen” for a special mission of God’s grace and plan and was “called to be an apostle” to proclaim salvation through Jesus.

These events had already been spoken of and promised by the prophets of the Old Testament: the “Suffering Servant” (Isaiah 53:1-12), the “Son of God” (Psalm 2:6-7), the “ruler to be born in Bethlehem” (Micah 5:1), and the “Savior born from the line of David” (2 Samuel 7). All these prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus.

Standing in the realm of resurrection (the flesh) and on God’s side (the Spirit), the word of authority that transcends sin and death is called the “Holy Spirit.” Through His resurrection, Jesus is publicly affirmed by God, His authority as Lord is made clear, and He is declared to be the “Son of God.”

The purpose of the proclamation is to make known God’s salvation and glory throughout the world and to spread His name. A way of life in which one’s heart and actions are aligned with God’s will through faith is called “obedience.” Paul refers to his understanding of the gospel, his apostolic calling, his power to proclaim, and the support he receives from God as “grace.”

Those who believe in the Lord are welcomed as members of God’s family, become “belonging to Jesus,” and begin a new way of life. By knowing that they are “loved by God” through His unconditional love and guidance, believers can place themselves securely in the Lord’s hands and find peace through entrusting themselves to Him.

● Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:18-24

Matthew's genealogy leading up to Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17), it is made clear that He is the Messiah, and this passage describes the circumstances of His birth. At that time, betrothal was a binding contract lasting about one year. The couple did not live together, yet they were legally husband and wife, and ending the betrothal required a formal certificate of divorce.

When Mary was found to be pregnant, if she herself had requested a divorce, it would have been regarded as adultery and could have placed her life in danger. Concerning her conception by the Holy Spirit, judgment was left to Joseph. Joseph was a "righteous man" who observed the Law and showed compassion for others. Since pregnancy during betrothal was considered unfaithfulness and subject to punishment, Joseph decided to protect Mary by planning a "quiet divorce."

Many Jews placed great importance on genealogies, and Joseph likely took pride in belonging to the house of David. The angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and addressed him as "son of David," reminding him of his lineage and God's plan. At that time in Judaism, the "Holy Spirit" was understood as a special work of God, which differs from the later Christian understanding of the Trinity.

The name Jesus means "salvation" and expresses both the prophecy that "He will save His people from their sins" and His mission. Mary's conception, the angel's announcement to Joseph, and the naming of the child all of these events fulfill Isaiah's prophecy of "Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14), meaning "God is with us."

Author: Akinori Kamachi    Translation: AI