

The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon
For December 21, 2025
Isaiah 7:10-16; Matthew 1:18-25
"At a Turning Point"

This sermon is heavily influenced by Victoria Larson from the Out of the Blue Advent Resource from BarnGeese Worship.

Prepare our hearts, oh God, to receive your word. Silence every voice in us but your own, so that we may hear your word. Amen.

As we approach the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere, you can feel and see the winter weather coming. We've been receiving plenty of rain and rainfall warnings. The prairies are being hit by snowstorms and extreme weather warnings. The evenings are getting darker and there is less of an urge to go outside after dinner. Night has gotten longer and longer for months, with today, December 21, being the longest day of the year. You can't help but ask, "are we finally at the turning point?"

There is also a lot of darkness in the world right now. War. Poverty. Homelessness. Human rights violations. Government agencies that seem to be working against the people instead of for them. I can hardly remember a time where these weren't the headlines in our newspapers or on T.V. Such feelings of endlessness and uncertainty in our lives and in our world. Will we ever be at the turning point? How would we know if we were? How would we tell?

Luckily God's perspective is broader than ours; God knows things that we couldn't possibly predict in our limited, human capacity. Throughout Advent, we experience this tension between human uncertainty and divine promise as we are continually surprised by things coming to us out of the blue, even though God has been trying to tell us about them for ages. The readings for this Sunday give us stories that reflect this tension between uncertainty and promise, giving us two different ways that we can respond to God.

In the reading from the Hebrew Bible, God seeks to relieve King Ahaz's uncertainty by sending him Isaiah to talk things through. Ahaz is navigating political upheaval, and it feels too risky to trust Isaiah's message of divine security in the face of two powerful empires seeking to devour his kingdom. Even when God offers him a sign, Ahaz voices his doubts, not wanting to "put God to the test."

Ahaz's concerns are deeply relatable. It sometimes seems like signs from God never show up when we need them, so we learn to work without them. We figure out how to navigate our lives as a series of gentle nudges of the Spirit, as small steps along a path we can't see. And maybe, if we've gone some time without a sign, without a prophet, without divine assurance, we learn about politically expedient choices: the solutions that will work even if they're not the ones we want. Surviving isn't the same as thriving, but it's not nothing either.

Ahaz shows us a way of dealing with uncertainty that feels clear and strong and decisive, but there's no room in it for a sign from heaven or a promise from God. Here's what happens next: Isaiah's prophecy holds. God's promises come true. But Ahaz is no longer a part of them. He's on a different path now, and he's taking all of Judah with him. None of this means that God abandons Ahaz or Judah, but it does mean that Ahaz has lost his chance to become part of what God was offering. What if Ahaz had said yes instead?

In Matthew, we have the beginning of Jesus' birth narrative and a different response to God's messenger than we found with Ahaz. When Joseph learns of Mary's pregnancy, he plans to dismiss her quietly. It's the right thing to do, both socially and politically. Joseph feels like it's his only option. It's the choice that will work, whether or not it's the thing Joseph wants. Enter God's angelic messenger.

The angel tells Joseph of a future he can't yet perceive. In the belly of the woman to whom he is engaged, God is knitting salvation, cell by cell. In the darkness of Mary's womb, an old promise is taking on new flesh, and this child will save the people from their sins. "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife," says the angel.

What if Joseph had said no? What if he'd done the smart thing, the proper thing? What if he hadn't let God come in and wreck the neatly-arranged-if-not-ideal future he had planned? If Joseph had said no, he would have been in the same situation as Ahaz – a lost chance to become part of what God was offering. Instead, Joseph says yes, and becomes the earthly father of God the Son. In turn, Jesus claims the title of Son of David, wrapping himself in Joseph's genealogy (which immediately precedes today's gospel text in Matthew). God the Son took flesh within a family and a faith that shaped the human who he was in a way that mattered profoundly.

God's purpose for creation is unavoidable, but that doesn't make our choices inconsequential. Many times in our lives we find ourselves at crossroads, not knowing which path to take. We sit at that intersection, hoping that we will choose the right direction. We look for signs from God, but perhaps we don't recognize them, or they aren't what we are expecting. In the end, we make a choice, and that choice comes with consequences. Are we Ahaz, choosing to ignore the signs and thus missing out on all the good that God brings? Are we Joseph, accepting God's message and bearing the difficulties the next 33 years brings, knowing that God's path was chosen?

It's hard to know when we've arrived at a turning point. And it's hard, too, to accept the invitation to be part of a future that we can't yet perceive. It's hard to take those first few steps into an unknown future, where we don't know the end result. It's hard putting all of our trust in God's hands, knowing that God is working in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. But that is exactly what God is doing through us, through our lives, through our community. God is inviting us to trust, to have faith, and to accept the guidance that God is offering.

St Peter's has had a few turning points over the last handful of years, and we have more yet to come in 2026. Many of these intersections in the road came as a surprise. Some of them, maybe not as much. But each time, you have had to sit at the junctures and discern what was God's will for this parish. Choices have been made, and consequences followed. This will be no different in the months to come. God invites us to join God in an unknown future with the knowledge that God will walk with us, no matter which path we choose.

Throughout Advent, we've read the stories of God's invitation over and over again. God goes to Elizabeth and Zechariah and says, "You." God goes to Mary and says, "You." God goes to Joseph and says, "You." God is actively inviting us to share in God's work in the present. God is coming to us now and saying, "You." You personally. You specifically. It is you whom God has been waiting for, you whom God is inviting into the turning points that, right now, only God can see.

When your invitation comes, what will you say?