

Trust the Promise: Be Joseph, Not Ahaz

A Disconnect That Connects

There is an obvious concurrence between our first reading and the Gospel: Isaiah 7 is fulfilled in Matthew's account. But there is also a striking disconnect that ends up connecting—the two principal figures. We meet King Ahaz and Joseph, husband of Mary. They are linked by lineage across seven centuries—Joseph carries David's line through Ahaz—yet their responses to crisis are almost exact opposites. That contrast helps us ask how we act when God prompts us.

History in Brief: Isaiah 7 in Context

After King David (c. 1000 BC) and his son Solomon kept Israel united, Solomon's sons fractured the kingdom into north (Israel, capital: Samaria) and south (Judah, capital: Jerusalem). Two centuries later a new superpower rises—the Assyrian Empire (capital: Nineveh). Threatened, Israel (the north) forms an alliance with Aram/Syria (capital: Damascus) and pressures Judah's king, Ahaz, to join them against Assyria. Ahaz refuses; Israel and Aram turn on him.

Enter Isaiah: “Do not enter into alliance; trust the Lord.” To strengthen Ahaz, Isaiah offers a sign. Ahaz—already set on a political deal with Assyria—masks self-reliance as piety: “I will not put the Lord to the test.” He doesn't want a sign because he doesn't want to trust the Lord.

Now compare Joseph. His crisis is Mary's pregnancy. He has considered a just and merciful plan to separate quietly. But unlike Ahaz's fearful, defensive, calculating stance, Joseph is troubled yet receptive. He listens to the angel, obeys, and takes Mary into his home.

Set side by side:

- Command: Ahaz is told, “Ask for a sign”—he refuses. Joseph is told, “Do not fear...take Mary your wife”—he obeys at once.
- Trust: Ahaz trusts politics; Joseph trusts God—even against what “makes sense.”
- Use of agency: Ahaz sacrifices others (even his own son in idolatrous rites) to secure his throne. Joseph sacrifices himself to serve the Holy Family.
- Worship: Ahaz introduces idolatry into Judah's worship; Joseph offers daily self-offering to God—what the Church calls a “sacrifice of praise.”

- Outcome: Ahaz's alliance weakens Judah, contributing to future disaster. Joseph's fidelity leads to the legal adoption of Jesus, incorporating Him into David's line—the promises are fulfilled through Joseph's yes.

The point is clear: be Joseph, not Ahaz. Most of us aren't planning anything as extreme as Ahaz, but we all have Ahaz-like tendencies—clinging to what we can manage, dressing self-reliance in pious language, resisting real trust.

Trust and Surrender

God's will is not oppressive. From Scripture to the saints, we learn that God's will leads to freedom and flourishing. The choice before us is the same as theirs: cling to what we can manage, or trust the promise we are invited to receive. Remember your identity from discipleship: you are a beloved child of God. Because you are beloved, the Father is always there; His will leads to freedom, peace, and real security in His love.

Two practical helps:

1. The Litany of Trust—for praying into trust and examining where we hold back.
2. The Surrender Novena—for handing matters into Jesus' hands and learning deeper surrender.

As we prepare for Christmas just days away, let us ask the Lord for greater trust and, beyond trust, true surrender—knowing His love in our lives and that His love endures forever.

Praise be Jesus Christ.