

## A sign of grace



Heather Smith *reflects on* Isaiah 7:10-16  
and Romans 1:1-7

**K**ing Ahaz has signed away Judah's liberty; they are now a vassal state of Assyria. Isaiah has come to give God's word to Ahaz and he is offered a sign. Surely a sign from God is a good thing? But Ahaz refuses it.

An Old Testament sign explains something that cannot be readily understood. So for example the sabbath is a sign of God's covenant. Signs like these usually end up forcing someone to change their mind or move forward in a way they haven't quite intended.

God gives Ahaz a sign anyway. We know it as a prophecy foretelling the birth of Christ: "the young woman is with child and shall bear a son", but it also refers to God's plan to liberate Judah from Assyria. Ahaz has taken a line-of-least-resistance approach to ruling, allowing pagan practices to flourish. God's deliverance might require Ahaz to stand up for what is right, not something for which he has shown much inclination so far.

We understand the sign of Christ's birth to the young woman Mary as grace – unearned favour from God. Opening his letter, Paul greets the Romans with the words "Grace to you", which seems a comfortable reassuring greeting. But it is just like the sign. God's unearned favour requires us to make a change in the way we live. 🍷

**God of grace, help us respond to your sign this Christmas. Show us how to change the direction of our lives and to stand up for what is righteous and true. Amen.**

## Christmas decorations

## Part 3 – the star

by Gillian Cooper

The star is in its usual place on the top of the tree. It properly belongs to Epiphany, not Christmas – the wise men will not follow it until January. But there it is, a piece of tradition, interchangeable with a fairy. Both star and fairy are magical. Both are the stuff of stories. Both have the traditional appeal to children. But the star has

a magic far deeper and more true. It tells us that there is a plan. That God has prepared for this moment, and has put the signposts in place. It tells us that for those with eyes to see, there is a path to salvation. It opens up access to all outside the Jewish community of Bethlehem and Nazareth. It marks the point in time and space where heaven and earth meet, and our way to heaven is secured. No fairy wand can do that kind of magic. 🍷

**“The eternal Son became a child so that I might become a child again and so re-enter with him into the kingdom of the Father.”**

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), Dutch Roman Catholic priest, writer and theologian

## Walking with Rosie

## Waiting

by Gillian Cooper

It is the dark time of the year – light appearing late and leaving early. Rosie and I walk often in the dawn or the twilight. Rosie is not bothered by the gloom – she knows that there is a treat from the Advent calendar awaiting her at home. The streets and shops are adorned with Christmas lights to cheer us up. But I must ignore them for now.

We are in the season of waiting. Advent calls us to resist the lure of the tinsel and the carols until the right time. We are asked to consider the most serious things of human life – heaven, hell, death and judgement. We are encouraged to watch and listen for signs of light and hope, not denying the depths of the darkness around us on the earth. Only then will we be ready to welcome the light of the world, born for us again. 🍷