

“Incarnation - Jesus, You Are Emmanuel”

Scripture: Matthew 1:20b-25; Hebrews 1:1-4, 4:14-16

Graphics: manger, cross, heart

Big Truth: Just as we desire physical contact and closeness to others, God desired for us to know Him physically and relationally close. God sent Jesus to earth in the form of a child so that we could know Him. He taught and suffered and died so we would know Him. He rose again, bodily, so that we would know Him. All that, also, so we would know ourselves. Jesus is King. Jesus is Savior. Jesus is Emmanuel. Jesus is the Light of the World. Jesus is the Word.

Focus Phrase: Jesus, You Are Emmanuel, come to be near us and with us.

1. Introduction

- A. Surrounded by friends, on March 2, 1791, John Wesley completed his earthly race. Grasping the hands of those who loved him, Wesley declared, “Best of all, God is with us.”
- B. Years earlier, he wrote, “For, what is religion, — I mean scriptural religion? For all other is the vainest of all dreams. What is the very root of this religion? It is Immanuel, God with us! God in man! Heaven connected with earth! The unspeakable union of mortal with immortal. For ‘truly our fellowship’ (may all Christians say) ‘is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. God hath given unto us eternal life; and this life is in his Son.’ What follows? ‘He that hath the Son hath life: And he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.’”
- C. His deep faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ, the Emmanuel of God, is what led Wesley to speak his dying words, “Best of all, God is with us!”
- D. Yet, in a real sense, even in our little corner of the world, the crises we are facing are not only theoretical or clinical. In the midst of a pandemic and all the tragic results of disease, shutting down businesses and schools, while being increasingly disconnected and isolated, especially during this Advent season, we may be asking ourselves the question, “Where is God?” “Is God with us?”
- E. This Advent sermon series is called *Incarnation*. Incarnation means God’s embodiment in human form. And not just God appearing to take human form in Jesus but actually becoming human...like us...for us.
- F. It’s God becoming human so that we would know that God knows what it’s like to be human. What it’s like to be us...to be me and you. The Incarnation gives us hope and confidence that even though we’re sometimes operating from a place of need, Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 are truth because of Jesus, “We are pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”
- G. This promise is true because Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us!

- H. 2,000 years ago, at the right time - God's perfect time - God made a bold move to once and for all make a lasting connection with His people...to be God WITH US.
- I. The plan - as outrageous as it was - was to become like one of them, to teach them about God, to suffer and die like one of them (even though He was still God), and then be raised from the dead, physically, in order for them to know that He is able to do the same for each one of them. That plan was carried out to perfection in a place called Israel, through a boy named Jesus.
- J. Throughout Advent, we're focusing ALL of our attention on Jesus, the incarnation of God...the One who is God's physical touch in the world and in our lives. If we know who Jesus is, then, because he was human like us, we will know who WE are to God. AND, the answer to the question, "Where are you God?" is "He is right here, WITH US."
- K. In week 1, we confessed, "Jesus, You are King"
- L. Last week, we confessed, "Jesus, You are Savior"
- M. Today, we confess, "Jesus, You Are Emmanuel"
- N. And, finally, right before Christmas next week, we will confess, "Jesus, You are the Light of the World"
- O. Let's pray and then dive into the next part of Jesus' birth announcement and then some theology from Hebrews!
- P. PRAY!
- Q. To Matthew 1 again today is where we'll go. This time, we read the rest of the birth announcement to Joseph the earthly father of Jesus...
- R. Let's read in Matthew 1:20-25...

2. Scripture

A. READ Matthew 1:20-25

- B. The term *Emmanuel*, sometimes spelled with an I or an E as the first letter, comes from Hebrew. The root word 'im' means 'with' and the root word 'el' means God. So, Immanu-el, means "God with us."
- C. The Hebrew word first appeared in the Old Testament in Isaiah 7:14, which reads, "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."
- D. That text was written in 735BC by the prophet Isaiah. Around that time in the history, Israel was broken into two kingdoms because of a civil war that God was not happy about.
- E. Isaiah was speaking for the Lord to King Ahaz, the king of the southern kingdom of Judah, warning him that God was about to bring an enemy against

all of Israel and Judah...and they were to be ready. Isaiah told of this ‘sign’, which was a young woman, pregnant, and the name of the child would be Immanuel, which we know means God with us.

- F. Fast-forward almost 800 years from that prophecy, to when Matthew, one of Jesus’ closest disciples, was writing his eye-witness account of the life of Jesus. Remember that Matthew was writing this after Jesus had been crucified and buried, raised from the dead and ascended back to heaven.
- G. Matthew knew well this section of scripture from Isaiah because Matthew was Jewish. He would’ve read these scriptures from Isaiah in worship and in his family home. He would’ve read how the Immanuel was prophesied to not only unite the nation of Israel, but to rescue them in Isaiah’s time.
- H. Matthew, as an adult follower of Jesus, also knew of the miraculous birth story of Jesus, having been told by Mary and Joseph and maybe even Jesus himself. It clicked in Matthew’s inspired mind that even though that prophecy in Isaiah was written for a by-gone age, ultimately the prophecy has come true fully in Jesus Christ...the King, Savior, Emmanuel, and Light of the World.
- I. In fact, any previous fulfillment of that prophecy paled in comparison to the finality of Jesus being Emmanuel, truly God with Us. Matthew’s personal knowledge of the fullness of Jesus’ Incarnation - birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension (and eventual return), inspired him to KNOW that Jesus was the last and final Immanuel for Israel and for ALL people.
- J. Jesus’ earthly father Joseph, records Matthew, did indeed take Mary home to be his wife. They did give birth to a son. They did name him Jesus.
- K. Now, naming is no small thing in that culture, I mentioned last week. The fact that the Angel told Joseph to name the boy, and not just name him himself is significant.
- L. By having Joseph name the boy, ‘Jesus,’ he was adopting Immanuel into the human family...to not only be God in human form, but to be fully God and fully human WITH US.
- M. And that term ‘WITH’ is a powerful word that indicates closeness, solidarity, presence, and walking alongside.
- N. When we confess “Jesus You Are Emmanuel,” not only are we confessing that Jesus is God, but that Jesus is God WITH (alongside, present, and close by) us.
- O. And, in fact, because of the presence of the Holy Spirit of Jesus, the Emmanuel is IN our hearts, living through us. (pause)
- P. The term Emmanuel doesn’t appear anywhere else in the Old or New Testaments. Matthew doesn’t keep bringing it up. However, the fact that the term doesn’t show up doesn’t mean that the life of Jesus doesn’t clearly show

that God is INDEED with us and all humanity, while he was on earth and after. In Matthew's gospel alone:

- i. In Matthew 10:40, Jesus said to his disciples (and to you and me), "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." Jesus is God with us.
- ii. In 13:37, Jesus was preaching and teaching about sowing seeds (sharing the Good News), and when asked to explain the parable, Jesus simply said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man..." basically saying that God himself, in Jesus, was among you preaching and teaching about God! Jesus is God with us.
- iii. In Matthew 18:5 and 25:40, Jesus spends time with and identifies with and counts children as part of his family...and commands us to care for the needy and the vulnerable. Jesus is God with us.
- iv. Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." in Matthew 18:20, which gives us incredible hope that Jesus is God with us RIGHT NOW RIGHT HERE.
- v. And, finally, in Matthew 28:20, as Jesus is ready to leave the earth and ascend to heaven, he gives the disciples the command to make disciples and baptize and then gives this promise, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus is God WITH us always, forever.

3. Application

- A. It's one thing to recall the Jesus of the Bible being present in all those ways for and to those who were around him, and even us by proxy. But, can we truly grasp the fact that Jesus' experience is the same as ours? That he is WITH us in the same ways that we might say, "Oh yeah...I'm with you, man!" It think we can...
- B. Adam Hamilton wrote this, "God knows the smell of rain on a summer day. He's tasted a meal of warm bread and smoked fish with a glass of wine. He knows the joy of sharing it with good friends. He's seen, with the same eyes we see with, the beauty of a sunset. He's known how the human heart feels when it loves deeply and the intensity of grief when a good friend dies. He knows what it feels to laugh and cry, to be angry and afraid - not as the omniscient, all-powerful, omnipresent God - but as we experience these things in the flesh." (Incarnation, p 104)
- C. Over the last two weeks, we made confessions that Jesus is King and Jesus is Savior. Both of those identities of Jesus are critical for us to make, as His followers. Yet, in some sense, they seem a little distant.

- D. Jesus IS king. Jesus IS Savior. We bow to our King and gratefully live out our lives because of Jesus sacrifice. Yet God’s first desire in Jesus is to come near to you.
- E. God comes near to you, to be WITH you in your deepest moments of grief and fear, and in your most profound moments of joy and celebration...and every moment in between. As close as a breath. As near as a thought.
- F. And because God is WITH you, three things become your hope and confidence, especially in a pandemic:
 - i. First, because God is with you, **You Can See God**
 - a. Sometimes, a young person in our Connections ministry or Sunday School will ask, “Where is God?” The essence of their question is: “I want to **see** God. Can you tell me how to see Him?”
 - b. I usually just say, “Go ask your teacher!” (nooo, I don’t say that!).
 - c. I start by saying that if we look into the sky at night or across the vast ocean, we see the reflection of God in the big things. God created the stars and the planets...no one else could do that and it didn’t just happen. And look at the deer and the trees. Only God could do that!
 - d. Then I say, “And we can see God in our bodies, since God told us we are made in His image and likeness.” Our bodies are so complex that only God could’ve done that.
 - e. But then, I always end with this: “The place I see God most clearly is in Jesus, His Son.”
 - f. Jesus said to the disciple Philip in John 14:9, ““Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”
 - g. Hebrews 1:1-3 gives us this incredible truth, “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...”
 - h. When we confess Jesus, You are Emmanuel, we can see God for real.
 - ii. Secondly, when you confess Jesus as Emmanuel, **You Need Not Fear**
 - a. Emmanuel, God with you, in the midst of a global pandemic, or any other fear-causing circumstance or transition in your life, gives us assurance that you are not alone.

- b. It's one thing to go through these things with others, it's an entirely different thing to have faith that God is in control and He has our best interests in mind.
 - c. Romans 8:28 is not just a bumper sticker. "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." You don't wish it or think it...you KNOW and God proves that to you over and over.
 - d. "Do not be afraid," said the angel that appeared to the shepherds and to Mary...and a whole bunch of other times in the bible.
- iii. And, because God is with us, **You Are Called to Love**
- a. Hebrews 4:14-16, "Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."
 - b. God's love for us has been 100% proven in Jesus Christ. And because Jesus is our King and Savior, and Jesus is our Emmanuel, then we can freely love God and love others like we love ourselves, just as he commanded.
 - c. And, remember, it's not YOU doing the loving, really. It's the Holy Spirit - Jesus the Emmanuel IN you - doing the loving of God and of others.
 - d. Wherever Jesus is...there is love.
- G. Because Jesus is Emmanuel, we can see God, we need not fear, and we are called to love.

4. Conclusion

- A. John Wesley was confident that God was with Him in mind, body, and spirit. His legacy is us sitting here today, over 200 years later.
- B. Bow down to King Jesus. Live with gratitude for Savior Jesus. And, in the most unlikely of mysterious, we have God with Us, Emmanuel, Jesus. Not only in the first century, but here with us...with you...today. Walk with him, talk with him, along life's narrow way...you ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.
- C. With one voice together, this morning, I invite us to lift up the confession, "Jesus, You Are Emmanuel!" As his people, this confession doesn't come from here (head), but from here (heart).

- D. So, let's stand, and three times, confess together: "Jesus, You Are Emmanuel" (3 times). Confess this with me... "Jesus, You Are Emmanuel!"
- E. Let's also pray together (words on screen)... "Who is like you, God Most High, drawing near to those who are low and in need to raise them up? We thank you that you have not left us alone, but that in your Son Jesus you came to be with us, as one of us. May we sense you near us even now, through your Spirit. May we take heart in our darkest and most fearful times, trusting that you abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel. And by your grace, may others know through what we do that God is with them. Amen."
- F. Let's sing about Jesus!