

Immanuel

December 16th, 2018

DAY 1 With Us is God

The Name

The name Immanuel appears twice in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament. One of the most comforting of all the names and titles of Jesus, it is literally translated with us is God or, as Matthew's Gospel puts it, God with us. When our sins made it impossible for us to come to Him, God took the outrageous step of coming to us, of making Himself susceptible to sorrow, familiar with temptation, and vulnerable to sin's disruptive power, in order to cancel its claim.

In Jesus we see how extreme God's love is.

1. Have you ever felt; discouraged, abandoned, or too timid to undertake some new endeavor?

It can be helpful to remember that Jesus is still Immanuel — He is still God with us.

Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of human beings? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and will call Him Immanuel." — Isaiah 7:13–14

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). — Matthew 1:22–23

2. What is going on in your life right now that you need the reminder that God is with you?

3. What strikes you about today's devotional?

DAY 2: God Reveals His Name

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son, and they will call Him “Immanuel” — which means, “God with us.”

— *Matthew 1:18–23*

Immanuel, I praise You for Your faithful love — drawing near when I was far from You. Instead of casting me away from Your presence, **You** came to call me home. Instead of punishing me for my sins, **You** came to free me from them. Immanuel, my God, **You** are here with me today. Live in me and glorify Your Name, I pray.

1. What strikes you as you view these verses through the lens of God coming down to be with us?
2. Anything else stand out about these verses that you didn't notice before?

DAY 3: Understanding the Name

The name Immanuel first appears in Isaiah 7:14 as part of a prophetic word that Isaiah spoke to King Ahaz of Judah (the southern kingdom) at a time when Syria and Israel (the northern kingdom) had formed a coalition against Assyria, the region's greatest power. They wanted Judah to join their uprising. The prophet Isaiah counseled Ahaz to trust in the Lord rather than to appeal to Assyria for help against Syria and Israel, who were threatening to invade Judah for refusing to join them. Then he invited Ahaz to ask the Lord for a sign to confirm the prophetic word, but the unfaithful king refused, having already decided to place his trust not in the Lord but in Assyria.

In response to Ahaz's refusal to trust God, Isaiah proclaimed:

Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of human beings? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and give birth to a Son, and will call Him Immanuel. — Isaiah 7:13-14

Shortly after that Syria and Israel were soundly defeated, exactly as Isaiah had prophesied. Many years later the southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed by Babylon, its people taken captive.

Matthew's Gospel recalls Isaiah's prophecy, applying it to the child who would be born of Mary, the virgin betrothed to Joseph. The sign given hundreds of years earlier to an apostate king was meant for all God's people.

In fact the Bible is nothing if not the story of God's persistent desire to dwell with His people.

In Jesus, God would succeed in a unique way, becoming a man in order to save the world not from the outside, but from the inside. Immanuel, God with us, to rescue, redeem, and restore our relationship with Him.

1. How have you experienced Immanuel — God being with you, in your life thus far?

Matthew begins and ends his Gospel (Matthew 28:20) with the promises that God is with us.

2. How would your life be different if you began and ended each day with the firm belief that God is with you?
3. What does this title of Jesus reveal about His nature?

DAY 4: Immanuel

“This took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name ‘Immanuel’” Matthew 1: 22–23.

People have long scrutinized Matthew 1:22–23 and the passage it quotes, Isaiah 7:14, leading them to deny the virgin birth. They say that since Isaiah uses *almah*, a Hebrew term literally translated as “maiden,” he is not affirming the virgin birth. This argument has no merit, for *almah* almost always refers to a young woman who is also a virgin. Also, the Septuagint, an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, understands that Isaiah is talking about a virgin as it renders *almah* with *parthenos*, the normal Greek word for “virgin.”

That said, Matthew may not be reading Isaiah as has been often supposed. When we look at the word “fulfill” in Matthew 1:22–23, we tend to think Isaiah saw into the future and made a prediction that could only come true for Mary. However, Isaiah 7:14 would then have no meaning to its original readers, Israelites living centuries before Jesus.

The context of Isaiah 7:14 explains why Matthew cites this verse. When Ahaz reigned in Judah, Syria and Israel threatened to invade Judah if he would not join them against the Assyrian empire. Yet this threat actually tempted Ahaz to seek aid from Assyria against these foes. God promised him protection if he did not join with Assyria, telling the king to ask for a sign to confirm His pledge. But Ahaz did not trust the Lord and would not ask for a sign. God gave Ahaz a sign anyway — a sign of cursing, not blessing! A child’s birth would signify that God would use Assyria to judge faithless Judah.

By natural means, Isaiah and his wife — formerly the virgin maiden — would produce Maher-shalal-hash-baz, a sign of God’s curse on those who trusted in an alliance with Assyria. And as the prophet warned, Ahaz would be humiliated in his deal with the Assyrian Empire (2 Chron. 28).

If this curse foretold by Isaiah came to pass, how can we escape the curse if we do not trust God when the sign is the very Son of God, born of a virgin? Just as Isaiah’s son signified a curse on Judah’s unbelief, so too does Jesus’ miraculous birth signify disaster for those who do not submit to God’s royal Son.

The fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus can only be understood if we first understand the meaning and application of the prophetic word for its original audience. In this case, Jesus fulfills or “fills up” the word of Isaiah because He, as a Son brought forth by extraordinary means, is the sign of a greater curse or blessing depending on how we respond to the Gospel. Let us follow Him alone as Savior and Lord so that we may receive the greater blessing.

DAY 5: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Of the many beautiful hymns that have been composed in celebration of the birth of Christ, few in my mind equal the depth of O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. The origins of the Latin version Veni, Emmanuel are obscure. It may have been composed as early as the 8th century. The melody appears to have originated in France in the 15th century. The hymn was translated into English by the Reverend John Mason Neale in the mid 19th century.

While the origins of the hymn and its development over time are interesting matters, they are not the reasons for the hymn's beauty. That rests on the subject matter. The hymn is based on a prophecy in Isaiah 7, a prophecy that looks forward to the birth of a child who will be named Immanuel, which means "God with us."

In Eden, God had been present with mankind, but as a result of the Fall, man was exiled from God's presence. From that point forward, the restoration of God's presence with man became a major theme that is developed throughout Scripture.

God chooses Israel as the people through whom He will reestablish His presence with man, and this begins in earnest with the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness and later the temple in Jerusalem. God dwells in the midst of His holy people, but only the high priest is allowed into God's direct presence and that only once a year.

At the time of the exile, Ezekiel sees God's presence depart from the temple as a result of the people's sin, but he and the other prophets look forward to a time when God will restore His presence with His people in a way that transcends the temple built with hands. Isaiah's prophecy of the child called Immanuel hints at this.

And then, in the fullness of time, Jesus is born, and Matthew tells us that His birth took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet Isaiah

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us") Matt. 1:23

Jesus is Immanuel. He is God with us. In Him all of the Old Testament types and promises that looked forward to the restoration of God's presence with His people are fulfilled. Jesus is the Son of God incarnate.

The words of the hymn express the hopes of Israel throughout her history for the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise. We as Christians can now look back to the fulfillment of those promises – to the most incredible, awe-inspiring moment in history, the birth of Immanuel, the incarnation of the Son of God Himself. In Jesus God established His presence once again with His people, and He is with us always – to the end of the age. Rejoice!