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Harvest Christian Fellowship (<https://hcfellowship.com/>)  
Saturday, December 24, 2022

## Matthew 1:23 (Read 1:18-23) “Immanuel: God with Us”

Intro. When a couple is expecting a baby, they usually go through the difficult task of deciding what to name their baby. I do not recall having much disagreement when Cheryl and I named our two boys. And in the case of Mary and Joseph, they had it rather easy because as we see in v.21, *God* named Mary’s baby for them. And so when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, they gave Him the name “Jesus.”

Now I do want you to understand that all names at that time carried a meaning that was clearly understood. Today, names are primarily means of identification. We are not usually concerned about the meaning of the name. My name, Stephen, is of Greek origin. The Greek word *stephanos* means “victor’s crown.” That was the reward given to the winner of an Olympic event. But my parents did not name me “Stephen” because of a hope that I would be a great athlete or a victor in some realm of life. I was named after my great, great, grandfather. So today we name our children after someone, or we pick a name because of how it sounds, or how popular it is. But at the time of the first Christmas, the meaning of a name was very important. Notice the words of the angel in v.21, “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” The name “Jesus” means “YHWH saves,” or “The Lord saves.” It was a very fitting name, for Jesus came to save us from our sins.<sup>1</sup>

The Old Testament prophecies gave many other names for the coming Messiah. For example, in Isa. 9:6 (NKJV) we read, “And His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.” It is not that Jesus was actually called these names at birth, but that these names would be characteristic of Him. Likewise, in our text today Matthew quotes Isa. 7:14, which says, “They shall call his name Immanuel.” Jesus was never called “Immanuel” as a proper name, but He was recognized as a true fulfillment of the *meaning* of the name. And so who was Jesus? I am going to show you this evening that He is truly and literally “God with us.”

This evening I want to share with you the meaning and implications of that phrase, by emphasizing in sequence each of the three words: GOD with us; God WITH us; and God with US. So let’s consider what that name Immanuel means:

### I. *GOD* with Us

Jesus is God, who came to be with us. Isn’t it amazing that the high and holy God of the universe would come down to us by becoming one of us! What an amazing act of condescension! That an angel should become a man is a matter of no great consequence. But when we look at Jesus, we should see Him as He truly is, Immanuel, “God with us.” Our Lord was incarnate in a human body, but yet in some wondrous way His body was prepared to sustain the indwelling of Deity. What an amazing miracle!

Is there good reason to believe that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ? Did God actually become a man, or is this just a fanciful Christmas story, like Rudolf the Red Nose

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<sup>1</sup> The name "Jesus" was popular in Judaism of the first century, given to sons as a symbolic hope of the Lord's deliverance from Roman oppression (Wilkins, p.77). Yet Jesus first had to deliver from sin (see Psa. 130:8).

Reindeer? Is this story of God becoming a baby, and then a man, similar to Greek mythology? Or did this actually happen? What I proclaim today is sober truth. I believe there is strong evidence that God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. How do we know Jesus is God? First of all, we know that Jesus is God:

A. Because of the Manner of His Conception - I believe that Mary herself was one of the main sources of the Gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus. This is her testimony. V.18 says that before Mary and Joseph came together in an intimate way, a baby was already growing inside her womb. The actions of Joseph indicate that the baby certainly was not his. He knew that was impossible. In v.19 we see that he had intended to break off the engagement secretly, and put her away. Well then, was some other man the baby's father? Absolutely not! The testimony of Scripture in v.23, which is a quotation of the prophecy of Isa. 7:14,<sup>2</sup> and the testimony of Luke 1:27 is that Mary was still a virgin when she conceived the child. "No way," says the skeptic. "Anybody who knows anything about nature knows that is impossible." Yes, but anybody who knows anything about God's nature knows that with Him nothing is impossible! In fact, in v.20 an angel gives the real explanation, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." Look over at Luke 1:35 and we read a similar statement. There, the angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God" (see also v.32). The Christ child was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had no earthly father. God Himself miraculously caused Jesus to be conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. That being the case, God was literally His father and He was the Son of God. Christ could not have been "Immanuel," God with us, unless He had been virgin born!

So through Mary Jesus was human, and through the miracle of God, He was also divine. But there is another reason why we should believe that Jesus was God with us:

B. Because Christ Himself Claimed to Be God - There are many Scriptures which assure us of this wonderful truth. Jesus Himself claimed in John 10:30 (NKJV), "I and the Father are One." In John 14:9 (NKJV) Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh, the fulfillment of this prophecy that God would come and be with us in the person of the Messiah.

Now any person could make such a claim, but Jesus is the only One who *proved* that His claim was valid. He calmed the storm. He healed the lepers. He caused the lame to walk, and the blind to see. Only God could do such miracles. He not only predicted the manner of His death, but also predicted and accomplished His resurrection (cf. Rom. 1:4). This is the claim of the risen Christ, and I believe Him!

Furthermore, the fact that God became man is also believable:

C. Because of the Testimony of His Apostles - The apostle Peter wrote, "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord

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<sup>2</sup> This introduces the first instance of Matthews "fulfillment formula," which is found 14 other times in this gospel. It is not the purpose of this message to address the historical context of the original prophecy, the dark days of national threat under the reign of King Ahaz. The prophecy probably had dual fulfillments, first when a young woman within the royal household, virgin at the time of the prophecy, gave birth to a son and named him, "God with us," giving assurance that deliverance would come. Yet the ultimate fulfillment would be the coming of Messiah, one of a virgin, who would truly be, "God with us."

Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16, NKJV). The men who knew Him the best confirmed His deity. They lived with Jesus. They knew both His private and His public life. They were eyewitnesses of His divine glory. In John 1:14 (NKJV) the apostle John wrote, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten Son of God.” The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:4 that Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead...” He also wrote in 1 Tim. 3:16 (NKJV), “...great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh...” And in Col. 2:9 (NKJV) Paul wrote, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” Even Thomas the doubter affirmed this truth. He was the one who said, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25; NKJV). But 8 days later the risen Christ appeared to him, and Thomas knelt before Jesus affirming, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28; NKJV). Never let us hesitate for a moment as to the Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though we shall never fully understand how God and man could unite in one person, yet, we should hold this truth as dear to our hearts.

Finally, we believe that God became man:

D. Because God Incarnate Was Necessary for Our Salvation – You see, it was absolutely necessary that God become a man, for that is the only way Jesus could fulfill His mission, to save us from our sin. The Bible says in Romans 3:23 (NKJV), “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” So we need a Savior. An incarnate angel will not do. A great saint cannot redeem us, for a sacrificial death even by a saint would only pay for his own sin. Only a great Savior, God in human flesh, can save us from our sin, shame, and judgment. And so, we should expect that the Savior of man would be God incarnate. Jesus fits the description. He is a great Savior; able to save, for He is Almighty God. Heb. 7:25 says, “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him...” And yet as a man He can redeem sinful man by bearing our sins upon Himself as a substitute. 2 Cor. 5:19 says, “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...”

Let me illustrate why only God, not man, could save us from our sin. Suppose I were to write you a check for a million dollars. You would be no better off, for my name is not good for that kind of money. But if Elon Musk were to write you a check for that amount, you would be a million dollars richer. What makes the difference? The difference lies in the resources of the person who writes the check.<sup>3</sup>

Even so, an angel could not save us. One of the great prophets of old could not save us. Only Immanuel, God with us, could save us! But if Jesus was just another man, a sinner like me, He could not even save Himself, much less the rest of us. He would have died for his own sin. But since He is Immanuel, born of a virgin without inherited sin, He is *able* to be my Savior, for He was able to live a sinless life, and die in our place. As God He conquered death and is able to bestow eternal life. Is He your Savior today?

Since there is such strong evidence that God became a man, this must show His interest in us. In older times especially, a King would seek good will with another King by giving his daughter to the son of the other king. The uniting of the families would promote good will and peace. In a similar way God sent His Son and united Himself with the human race. What is also amazing is the fact that Jesus retains His humanity in a glorified form (1 Tim. 2:5). So we should not have any

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), p.37.

doubts as to God's purpose and desire to save us. God cannot intend to destroy that race which He thus weds unto Himself. Though sinners do well to fear God, we may lift our heads with joyful hope of our salvation, for God has sent His Divine Son to be our Savior! Also, since He is God, then as Ephesians 3:20 says, he "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (NKJV).

So Immanuel means that *God* came to be with us in the person of His Son. Now let us focus on the middle word of the meaning of that name:

## II. God *WITH* Us

It's not just that God is up there in heaven. Instead, He has also come to be "with" us. In the Greek "with us" is placed first for emphasis. Furthermore, the Greek word translated "with" (*meta* with genitive) means to be "present with"<sup>4</sup> or "among." The selection of this word (rather than *sun*) shows better that God wanted close association and fellowship with us. Now, like Enoch, you can "walk with God," and like Abraham, you can talk with Him as a man talks with his friend. The significance of Matthew's interpretation of Jesus name as Immanuel cannot be overstated. This theme forms the heart of a personal relationship of Jesus with His followers.

We also see a contrast in emphasis. In the word "God" lies His majesty; but in the words "with us" we see His mercy. In the word "God" we see glory; in the words "with us" we see grace. Though we were separated from God by our sins, He has drawn near unto us in mercy and grace. In John 1:14 the Bible says (NKJV), "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Glory and grace merged in the person of Jesus Christ. And now, because of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, God can be *with* each person who believes, and embrace sinners as His children.

Now the fact that God is now *with* us means:

A. He Is with Us through All the Experiences of Life - God did not come to be with us for a brief visit of just a few days or months. Instead, God became one with us from infancy through adulthood. Perhaps we can somehow grasp God becoming a *grown* man. But can we comprehend the God of this universe becoming a dependent baby? Yet, it happened, and for a good reason. God in Christ experienced *all* the struggles of childhood, youth, and adulthood. As the book of Hebrews says, He can sympathize with us in that He was tempted in all points like us (4:15). God can thus assure us more fully that He understands us in every stage and circumstance of life.

Were you in the cradle? He was there. Were you a child under parental authority? Christ was also a boy in submission to His parents in the home at Nazareth. Are you an adult, struggling to earn a living? So did He, as He worked in the carpenter's shop. Are you alone? So was He. Have you experienced poverty? So did He. Have you experienced bereavement? So did He. Evidently Joseph died before Jesus did (cf. John 19:27). He wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus. Have you experienced rejection? So did He (Jn. 1:12; Isa. 53:3). Jesus was slandered and betrayed. The crowds yelled out, "Crucify him, crucify him." He knows and understands our troubles and trials.

So when you have a problem, it is wonderful to be able to talk with the divine One who has already experienced it and come through trials successfully. Truly, He was with us in a way that we should appreciate and respond to. Take your problems to Jesus in prayer. He understands.

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<sup>4</sup> See how *meta* is used in John 3:2, "for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Acts 7:9, "but God was with him [Joseph]." Acts 10:38, "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

This also means that:

B. He Is with Us by His Spirit – I think it is interesting that the Gospel of Matthew begins with the assurance that in Jesus, God is with us. Then, it ends with the promise of Jesus in His Great Commission, “behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20). In John 16:7 Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit as our Comforter, one called alongside. Jesus is always with us by means of the person of the Holy Spirit.

Finally:

C. He Is with Us in Death and Beyond – We need God to help us with the struggles of life. But we especially need God as we face death. Isn't it marvelous that you do not have to face death alone? Oh, most people will have family and friends at their deathbed, yet how tragic it was that during the first year of the pandemic, many died alone! Yet even when family is present, they will not go with you through the door of death itself. But for the believer in Jesus, our Immanuel, He will be with us even in death. You see, Jesus identified with us in death as well as in life. The Bible says He tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9). But Jesus did not remain a victim of the clutches of death. He rose from the dead. Jesus said, “Because I live, you shall live also” (John 14:19 NKJV). We His people are not left to face death alone. When we go through the valley of the shadow of death we will not fear, because He is with us (Psa. 23). And if we pass through death's door, He will at the very least meet us on the other side. In John 14:3 (NKJV) Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

So because Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, let us face death without fear. Let us face death with peace, and joyful anticipation of what will follow. Rev. 21:3 says regarding our future heavenly home, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” What a blessing it is to know Jesus as your Savior. He is truly Immanuel, God *with* us!

Finally, Immanuel means:

### III. God With *US*

Who is the “us” here? Though the prophecy of Isa. 7:14 was first given to the Jews, does that mean that we Gentiles are excluded? No! For if the promise implied in His name was intended only for the Jews, then it would read, “And you shall call his name Immanuel.” Period! But v.23 says, “‘Immanuel’, which is translated, ‘God with us.’” That Hebrew name was translated into Greek for all the Roman world to understand. Today, it has been translated into hundreds of languages. This same Jesus sent His apostle Paul and others to the Gentiles to proclaim the same message of salvation that was preached to the Jews. So surely God sent Immanuel for *all* of us. So this means:

A. *All* Are Invited to Come To Christ - They rightly feared to approach God at Mt. Sinai. In fact, only a select few like Moses and the High Priest could approach God. But they did not hesitate to approach that babe in Bethlehem. You may come to the humble Jesus. The “us” in the name “Immanuel” includes all of us. Do not stay away through fear of your unfitness. The lowly shepherds came to Him. I do not read anything about them putting on their best garments first. They did not go to the temple first for cleansing. God accepts you as you are. Come to Christ first,

and then let Him change what is not pleasing in His sight. We come to Christ just as we are, but He doesn't leave us just as we are. He changes us more and more into His own image by His Spirit, and by His Word.

Have you come to Jesus in repentance and faith? Surely in an audience this size there is at least one who hasn't yet come to Jesus. God came *to us* through His Son Jesus. Now we should come *to Him* through His Son Jesus. So:

B. Come Now! Let us come now without any question or hesitancy. You do not first need to get a priest, for Christ is our priest. How can you refuse? For any man to say, "I will not come to God," after God has come to us is an act of treason against the King of the universe! Say it, sinner, "I will arise and go to my Father and will say unto him, 'Father, I have sinned'." If God was willing to humble Himself to be with you; shouldn't you be willing to take your stand with God? Though the world forsakes Him, I'll stand with Jesus, for He is Immanuel, God with us. The gentle Jesus said in Mt. 11:28, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He said in John 6:37 (NKJV), "the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." Christ invites you to come to Him. He promises rest for your soul. He promises to receive you. Come to Him without delay.

Conclusion: Would there be a better time to give your life to Christ than this Christmas Eve? How do you come to God? You come to Him in prayer. The Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13; NKJV). Come to Jesus, this Christmas. I or one of the Elders will be happy to talk to you about trusting in Christ and lead you in a prayer to receive Christ as your Savior. May you know in your heart that God is truly with you this Christmas Eve.

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. I (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); Charles H. Spurgeon, *12 Christmas Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976 reprint), 79-90; Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway, Good News Publishers, 2001).

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