

Jesus Our Immanuel.

Text: Matt 1:18-25

Suggested Hymns:

34, 627, 626, 288, 33

1) God Came To Earth In Jesus, Our Immanuel

2) Why God Came To Earth

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 1:18-25, *¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.*

²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

²⁴ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵ and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

You and I have been invited to attend the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Gladly we have accepted the invitation. For to us this is an occasion of such joy and thanksgiving that we wish to observe it in communion with all fellow Christians.

Our celebration of the Saviour's birth is not limited to our congregation assembled here today. It takes in our members who are confined to their homes; it reaches out to our sister congregations, to loved ones far from home, to people of other lands, and yes, into heaven itself. With all true believers we worship today the Saviour, who has made us His own.

In our worship we separate ourselves from the world with its empty, vain, delusive joys, and its utter disregard of the true meaning of Christmas. The unbeliever does not even want a part in our celebration. He may seek the company of others and with them celebrate the day in a shallow, earthly way, trying to crowd out the loneliness of his heart, but as an unbeliever he does not and cannot glory in that feeling of oneness with all the saints which we have at Christmas time.

We Christians go back in spirit today to Bethlehem. With hearts filled with love we come to the manger bed and there see our Saviour. We learned to know Him as our Saviour through the study of His holy Word. How natural it is, therefore, that we go to His Word to get inspiration for the celebration of His birth! The Evangelist St. Matthew tells us to contemplate the greatest story ever told: *Jesus Our Immanuel, God with us*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. God Came To Earth In Jesus, Our Immanuel

Jesus' Illustrious Ancestors

¹⁸ *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows.* There was a man whose name was Joseph. His father's name was Jacob, his grandfather's, Matthan. Going back further into his ancestry, we find that he was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then also of David and Solomon, and many other kings. His family had, therefore, been illustrious in the past. Like many of his ancestors, Joseph was a just man, fearing God and seeking to obey His laws.

Matthew also gives us the name of Joseph's wife. She was none other than the Virgin Mary, who, like her husband, was of the house of David and was a true child of God. Moreover, the Evangelist St. Luke tells us that Mary found favour with God, for from all of the millions of Jewish women over a period of many hundreds of years she was chosen to be the mother of the Christ Child.

So the birth of Jesus was as follows; He descended from a long line of kings, among them David and Solomon; He was also a legal descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and furthermore, He was born into a godly Jewish family.

Matthew stresses the fact that Jesus was born, that His coming into the world was in this respect like that of any other child. His mother Mary conceived and brought forth a son. Jesus was her own flesh and blood

Jesus, the Virgin born

But when Matthew introduces the story of the birth of Jesus, saying, ¹⁸ *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows*, he indicates that there was a great difference between His birth and that of the many ancestors of Jesus whom he had mentioned in the opening verses of his Gospel.

When telling of the birth of Isaac and Jacob and David and Solomon and all others, Matthew had been careful to give the name of the father of each. We read, *Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.*¹ And so Matthew continues for fifteen verses, mentioning no less than thirty-nine fathers. In only four instances the name of the mother is also given.

But with Jesus it was different. Joseph did not beget Him. Matthew makes that very clear. Although he speaks of Joseph and Mary as man and wife, he twice refers to Mary as a virgin. He tells us that Joseph *did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.*²

In fact, Joseph was alarmed when he saw that Mary would soon be a mother, for he had not yet taken her into his own home. They had not yet come together, our text says. Before the angel of God appeared to Joseph, he was troubled with the thought that Mary who was to share his home had been unfaithful to him.

How else could it be that she was with child? Yes, how could it be? That is always the question that suggests itself to us. That was also Mary's question when the angel told her that she had found favour with God and would be the mother of the Christ Child. *Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"*³ Joseph did not ask the question. But it was in his mind. He wanted to believe that Mary had been faithful to him. But he couldn't. The facts argued against it.

Then the angel of God cleared up the matter for him, and for us as well, by telling him that Jesus was conceived in Mary by the Holy spirit. That, dear Christian, is a part of the great miracle of Christmas. The Christ Child is the Son of the Virgin Mary, but not the son of any man.

This God had foretold hundreds of years before. Thus He fulfilled it in time. If we keep in mind that it was His work, our reason will find no objection; our faith will hold to the truth; and we will be prepared to join the shepherds in their devotion and the angels in their song of praise.

Jesus Is God with Us

But the shepherds did not go to Bethlehem merely to see a wonder child. The multitude of the heavenly host did not come down from heaven because a Jewish virgin had borne a son whose birth had been long foretold.

The real miracle of Christmas is not the Virgin Birth. It is something so wonderful, so glorious, that even the Holy angels cannot comprehend it. It is this, that the Son of Mary is at the same time the Son of God.

Matthew uses no less than three names in speaking of Mary's Son, each of which reveals Him to us as God. Firstly, he calls Jesus the Christ, the Anointed, and the Messiah, of whom the Psalmist wrote a thousand years before, *⁶ Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. ⁷ You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.*⁴ In these verses it is clearly stated that God's Son was to be anointed and for this very reason was called the Christ, the Messiah,

Secondly, the angel that appeared to Mary and later to Joseph said that His name would be called Jesus. That again is a divine name. It means, Jehovah is Helper. Jehovah is the name which God gave to Himself as the Covenant God. It is a name which revealed His great love to the Jews, but it just as clearly reveals His deity. And applied to Jesus, it declares Him also to be true God.

But Matthew is not yet finished with the story. He adds a third name. ***And they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, "God with us.*** In His person God and man are inseparably joined together, so that Jesus' body is God's

body; His soul is God's soul. So the birth of Jesus was *as follows*, that Mary conceived and brought forth the Son of God, her own Lord and Creator.

The fact of all this is clear, but the mystery and meaning of it is beyond all human understanding.

Martin Luther voices it in the words,⁵

O Jesus Christ, all praise to Thee,
Who didst flesh assume for me;
To dwell with men Thou dost not scorn,
And angels shout to see Thee born.

Paul Gerhardt re-echoes the theme, saying,⁶

God is man, man to deliver;
God's own Son
Now is one
With our blood for ever.

And Isaac Watts joyfully sings,⁷

Joy to the world! the Lord is come:
Let earth receive her king;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing.

It is the same message in every age. And always and again it meets with the same response on the part of God's children. We cannot but say with Luther:⁸

Ah, Lord, who hast created all,
How weak art Thou, how poor and small,
That Thou dost choose Thine infant bed
Where ass and ox but lately fed.

Were earth a thousand times as fair,
Beset with gold and jewels rare,
Yet were it far too poor to be
A cradle, Son of God, for Thee.

How beautifully these words sum up the thoughts in our hearts as we worship our Immanuel, our God, who came to earth as a tiny Babe on the first Christmas! Jesus, our Immanuel! Those words indicate clearly that God came to earth.

But they also indicate why He came to earth. Although the gift of God's Son is great indeed and we can rejoice in the fact that He is with us, we find far greater cause for joy in the fact that He came as our Saviour, as our Deliverer.

2. Why God Came To Earth

Men Seek Release from Sin

Many a weary soul would consider it a most wonderful gift to be taken from this earth at Christmas time. People in hospitals, nursing homes, and thousands of private homes sheltering men and women who are not at home in this world, but are seeking an abiding dwelling place in heaven above. They desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. It is not difficult to see why.

Even those of us who are in good health, who have what we need for body and life, pray daily in the Seventh Petition of the Lord's Prayer that when our last hour comes that God would take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven.

Now, God did not make this world a vale of tears. It was beautiful, perfect in every detail when He made it. But sin entered into the world and brought with it all manner of evil, so that even Christians suffer its consequences as long as they remain on earth. The Apostle Paul was moved by his own personal experience to say, "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.*"⁹

Just one of the many sufferings which Joseph and Mary had to endure is brought out in our text and shows how far sin has gone to make this world a vale of tears. Joseph was tortured with his thoughts about Mary. His simple piety strove against his feelings for the woman he loved and caused him to determine to put her away. It was not easy to do so.

Joseph had had no reason to lose faith in Mary before this time. He had always been able to trust her. He knew her to be a God-fearing woman. But the presence of sin in the world caused Joseph to believe that Mary, his betrothed wife, had fallen prey to it.

And Mary must also have suffered. She had not told Joseph of the angel's visit and of his wonderful announcement. God had not told her to do so. The presence of sin in the world therefore made it possible for men to accuse her of infidelity. Men would be bound to judge her and condemn her if something was

not done soon to protect her. Thus two hearts that were near and dear to each other were torn apart by the presence of sin in the world.

So it is with all Christians. Our hearts are constantly grieved because of sin. We suffer grief because of our own sinfulness, or because of the sins of others, or because others suspect us of having done wrong. And we know that it will be so as long as we are on earth. It is a sad world in which we live.

There is no love so pure, no faith so strong, no godliness so sacred, no name so untarnished, that doubt and suspicion cannot drag them down and cast a shadow upon them. Trials and conflicts like those of Joseph show more plainly than all the gross sins of wicked men how deeply sin has entrenched itself in the world. The erring, stumbling, sinning of godly souls is one of the saddest proofs of the wickedness of the world.

The Saviour Brings Release

But into this sad story of our sinfulness and shame the Christmas Gospel injects a note of joy when it announces that Jesus is our Immanuel, that God's Son is our Saviour. That was His great purpose in coming to earth, namely, to seek and to save that which was lost. He spent some time in healing the sick, in cleansing the lepers, in raising the dead, but His calling was to earn redemption for all mankind by taking upon Himself the sins of the world. That is why He is called Jesus. He is the Saviour from sin.

Although I cannot promise you health in Jesus' name on this glad Christmas day, since Jesus did not heal all the sick of His day; and although I cannot assure you of other earthly gifts and treasures, since Jesus withheld many of these from His disciples, yet this much I can say to you: *Be of good cheer. Jesus, your God and Saviour, has forgiven all your sins.*

And with this assurance to cheer you, I can add that you will lack none of those things which, in the eyes of your heavenly Father, are good for you. Scripture says in Romans 8:32, ³² ***He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?***

In this, then, let us find our Christmas joy that Jesus is our Immanuel. Here on earth we can live in close communion with Him, partaking of the comfort and

encouragement of His holy Word, following His divine guidance, and leaning on Him for support.

And when He sees fit to do so, He will bring us even closer to Himself in heaven, where we shall forever sing His praise with all saints and holy angels. Let this thought cheer you and fill you with joy this Christmas Day. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 1:2

² Matthew 1:25

³ Luke 1:34

⁴ Psalm 45:6-7

⁵ Hymn 20

⁶ Hymn 24 v2

⁷ Hymn 627

⁸ Hymn 23 v9, 10

⁹ Acts 14:22