

## “Emmanuel”

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23

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It is not normally my habit to give a sermon on Christmas Eve. Doing so creates extra work for me, and runs the risk that I might say something that might offend somebody, on this most holy night of the year. But, as I have said before, this is *not* a normal year. If you would give me just a few minutes...

I want to talk about the word “Emmanuel.” You know, like “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” It is, of course, a biblical word, though not a very common one; it occurs only three times in the Bible – twice in the book of the prophet Isaiah, and once in the Gospel according to Matthew. It is usually spelled “E-m-m-a-n-u-e-l,” with an “e” at the beginning, though sometimes you will see it “I-m-m-a-n-u-e-l.” The “e” spelling is customary in English, Latin, and Greek; the “i” spelling is closer to the original Hebrew.

The word appears first in Isaiah 7:14: “Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” There is another brief, and less significant, mention of “Immanuel” in Isaiah 8:8. Matthew quotes the first passage in his gospel, when he says “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel.’” (Matthew 1:22-23) “Emmanuel” is another name for Jesus.

But what does it mean? It’s really quite simple. It’s four syllables in Hebrew. The first syllable, “im,” is a very common preposition, that has a basic meaning of “with.” When you add the middle syllables “manu” to that, it becomes “with us.” The last syllable, “el,” simply means “God.” So putting it all together, we get “with us, God” or “God with us.” “Emmanuel” simply means: *God is with us.*

And that is, of course, *exactly* what the coming of Jesus signifies. God did not just stay in the *heavenly* realm. God came down *here*. God became *one of us*. Fully human. Equipped with a human body, and endowed with human emotions. *We worship a God who knows what it feels like to be human.* God came to this world because God *cares*. God came to this world because God *loves*. God loves *us*. No matter what may be going on in this world, God loves *you*. God is with *you*.

What does that mean, in this sad and bizarre year we call 2020? It means *everything*.

If you are missing your family and friends this Christmas ... *God is with you*. If you live in a healthcare facility and haven’t been able to see your family members face-to-face for months ... *God is with you*. If you are in the hospital this Christmas ... *God is with you*. If you are fighting any kind of disease or illness or infirmity ... *God is with you*. If you stuck in quarantine, or awaiting test results ... *God is with you*. If you are a healthcare worker, trying desperately to help people and save lives ... *God is with you*. If you are a health official, frustrated by the lack of caution on the part of too many people ... *God is with you*. If you are a student, consigned to do all your schoolwork remotely, missing your

friends and normal activities ... *God is with you.* If you are a teacher, trying your best to take care of the students in your care, while some of them seem to be slipping off the radar screen ... *God is with you.* If you lost your job this year ... *God is with you.* If you have been temporarily laid off ... *God is with you.* If your store or business was forced to close this year ... *God is with you.* If you are using up your savings to try to keep your business afloat ... *God is with you.* If you are facing eviction ... *God is with you.* If you are living in a homeless shelter ... *God is with you.* If you are struggling with depression ... *God is with you.* If you are afraid of what tomorrow may bring ... *God is with you.* If you are an election worker who has been harassed or threatened ... *God is with you.* If you are a person of color who suffers the constant sting of racial prejudice ... *God is with you.* If you are *anybody, anywhere* ... GOD IS WITH YOU.

Jesus. Emmanuel. *God-with-us.* Those aren't just *words.* They are words with *meaning.* Words with *power.* Words filled with *hope.* No matter what may be happening, no matter what pain you may be suffering, what horrors we may be living through, *GOD IS WITH YOU.* Forever, and always, God is *right by your side,* ready and willing to sustain you, to comfort you, to care for you in your time of need.

And God will *never* leave you. Never in a million years, God will *always* be with you.

*That's* what "Emmanuel" means. Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, God! Emmanuel – *God with us!*

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