

EMMANUEL – “GOD IS WITH US FOREVER” – “THE PROMISED EMMANUEL”

As we begin this series for the Christmas Season, my prayer is that our hearts and minds will be open to be touched, not just by the spirit of the holidays, but by the Spirit of the Living God. For, if we do not experience a close encounter with Him, the true concept of “*Emmanuel*” will likely elude us. Yet, how do we accomplish this? How do we get back to the heart of what Christmas is really all about? How do we keep from losing our way, when the path is so often cluttered with the trappings of tradition, if not covered in the dust of apathy? It seems to me the best course may be to “*set our course for the source.*”

Journey with me first through the words of God’s Prophet in **Isaiah 7:14**. Here we find a familiar verse on Christmas cards. ¹⁴ **The Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him ‘Emmanuel.’** This is a prediction of an unusual birth that would serve to confirm that God was at work fulfilling His promise to His people. Yet this is a special prophecy in that it has a dual meaning – one for the people of that time – and one for people of all time.

The prophet Isaiah would father a child with a young maiden who would serve as a sign of God’s presence. This was to assure the people of God that even when things seemed bleak, they had not been abandoned. **God was still on their side.** Yet, our heavenly Father had **an even more important message** in this prophecy that we might not have been aware of at all if not for the Holy Spirit’s help in the 1st chapter of **Matthew’s** account of the Gospel.

(Page 1497) After giving a detailed genealogy of Abraham’s family tree, we read in 18^{ff}: **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.**

¹⁹ **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.** ²⁰ **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.”** ²¹ **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.”** ²² **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 ‘Emmanuel’” -- which means, ‘God with us.’**”** ²⁴ **When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.** ²⁵ **But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name ‘Jesus.’**

Take special note of three phrases here. **“(Mary) was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.”** / **“What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”** / **“The virgin will be with child...”** Though I may understand the natural process, I still see a miracle in the conception and birth of any child. There’s wonder in God’s working in creating new life.

Yet, as amazing as a “normal” birth might be, this one is unique. Matter of fact, that’s the point of the language of Scripture declaring that this is “*the only begotten.*” If Joseph had been able to send a sample of the child’s DNA to **ancestry.com** the results would show that though Abraham was Jesus’ great, great, great grandpa, Joseph was not the boy’s daddy. This child’s paternity test would reveal the dad’s DNA was not in their data bank, at all.

Of course, Joseph already knew he wasn’t the father – but rather than make a public spectacle out of the situation and ruin Mary’s reputation, he decided to discretely break off the engagement. That was before an angel from heaven talked him out of it. Imagine the conversation: *“This child may not be yours – but God has chosen you to raise Him.” / “Yea, but...” / “No but’s. This is not just another child - this is God’s kid, miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit. He’s going to be with you for the next several years.” / “Yea, but, I have other plans...” / “Forget about those, God has a bigger plan. This is the promised Emmanuel, who will save His people from their sins. Believe it, Joseph – and receive God’s Son to yourself.”* Perhaps there was more he wanted to say, but recalled that his fiance’s Uncle Zechariah was speechless after an angelic visitation in the temple just a few months earlier. At any rate, Joseph just did as he was told.

At the risk of oversimplifying, this fulfillment of the prophecy confirmed that **God had come along side**. We know that as valuable as it is to have someone supporting us from afar – it doesn’t come close to having them personally present. Yahweh’s people were once so afraid of Him that they pleaded for Him to keep His distance. They preferred to have Moses as a mediator – carrying messages back and forth. And then when Yahweh God insisted that He was going to dwell among them, it was still preferable for priests to intercede for them – serving as a buffer, if you will, so that they never had to get too close and personal with the Almighty. But now...

We will stress this point throughout this season. “**Emmanuel**” (*Immanuel*) means. “**God with us.**” The Lord of hosts had come to earth to live among us. The Creator of the universe moved into our neighborhood. Once more, that is the precise language of Scripture. In the first chapter of John’s account of the Gospel, we’re told that **¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.** I don’t know where or when I first heard it, but I suspect you’ve heard something similar. Someone of questionable reputation or character comes by and the complaint is voiced, “*There goes the neighborhood.*” Property values will surely plummet. Cozy comfort will be disrupted as safety and security is threatened. But when Emmanuel “*moved in,*” there was defiantly an upgrade in the residency! The angels rejoiced that day saying, **“Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth toward men on whom His favor rests.”** (Luke 2:14)

We've concentrated upon the fact the child would be called "*Emmanuel*." Yet, let us not miss that the angel instructed Joseph to give Him the name "*Jesus*." Why? **"Because He will save His people from their sins."**