

“THE EMMANUEL OF CHRISTMAS”

Merging Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 2:1^{ff}.¹⁸ 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 didn't want to expose her to public disgrace, he decided to put her away quietly.²⁰ But after he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, "Joseph son of David, don't 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're 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 said through the prophet (*Isaiah*):²³ "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel" -which means, "God with us."²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as 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. / Lk 2:1 It was in those days that Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census to be taken of the entire Roman world.² (*This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.*)³ Everyone went to his own town to register⁴ so Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. / Mt 1:25^b Joseph gave the child the name Jesus. (*Meanwhile*)⁸ there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.¹⁰ But the angel said, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be FOR ALL the people."¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth FOR ALL upon whom His favor rests."¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has told us about."¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.¹⁷ When they'd seen Him, they spread the word concerning what they'd been told about this child,¹⁸ and ALL who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said.¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they'd heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

I'm sure you've gotten more than one of those recordings. You know...

When you call a business and the voice on the other end of the line says, *“For English, press 1; para Español, o prima dos...”* Perhaps you find it annoying, but I want you to think for a moment about the reason that message is there. The business is anticipating that their service reaches people of other languages.

If you haven't already, you're likely to find an instruction manual with some device or appliance that you receive for Christmas. It will likely have the information printed in at least English and Spanish – but perhaps also French, Chinese, and who knows how many other languages. I bought Nina a **Smart TV** for her birthday last year. The manufacturer evidently assumed some users aren't so smart no matter what their background. The user manual had pages of info to wade through in **3** languages. Why? They expected the product to be used by people from many other nations and cultures.

Now, listen again to the prophecy of Isaiah that the angel referred to: **“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel”** – **“which means”** - or **“is interpreted”** - **“God with us.”** This prophecy was first delivered to the Hebrew people, but was obviously intended for people of other languages. It's almost as if God was saying, *“For Hebrew press 1. For all others press 2...”* Or: *“Jews should read these instructions. For all others, the text has been translated into your own language.”*

My point? The Holy Spirit's intent was for all people to grasp the message. Though Jesus had come to save His people, the good news was for **ALL** people. In other words, anyone, no matter how far they felt they were from God, could come close because of Emmanuel – and God wants you to know that this morning. Your nationality or ethnicity is of no consequence. Your history doesn't matter. Because God came to earth, your mistakes can be forgiven and forgotten in a blink of an eye. Your fears and anxieties can be overcome. Your feeling of guilt and condemnation can be alleviated, once and for all. How do I know that? The angel declared there is now **“Peace on earth FOR ALL upon whom His favor rests...”** Oh, but there's the issue. Upon whom does His favor rest – and what is this allusive peace?

First and foremost – there is **peace with God**. Though mankind had rebelled against Him and deeply offended Him, it was God who extended the olive branch in the gift of His Son. *“If you won't come to me, I'll come to you, offering forgiveness and reconciliation.”* **Romans 5:1-2** makes this pretty clear: **“Since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we've gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”**

Knowing this, there's also **peace within**; a deep contentment no one can take away. In **John 14:27** Jesus promised His followers this peace which defies logic and human reason. Paul referred to it as **“peace that passes understanding”** in **Philippians 4:7**.

This peace is not dependent on “*everything being right with the world*” but about us being right with God.

Finally, there’s **peace with others**. The more God is with me, the less combative and competitive I become. Why? Stuff loses its hold on me. My possessions don’t possess me. A post this week said: “*The older I get the shorter my Christmas list becomes.*” The post suggested it is because we realize the things that really matter can’t be bought. I would say to you that “*As we mature in Christ, the shorter my list becomes because I know what really matters has already been bought.*” And that reality also applies to things like popularity, position, and prestige. God loves me and that’s what matters. I am accepted in the heavenly realms as His child. What could top that? So other than standing up for God and for those who are oppressed, what else is worth fighting for?

And to whom is all this peace available? To all upon whom His favor rests... Who is that? Biblically speaking it is those who believe in Him and who will humbly accept the gift of His Son as both their Savior and Lord. After Jesus lived a sinless life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins on Calvary, people assembled on the Day of Pentecost asked what they needed to do be saved. The Holy Spirit spoke through the apostle Peter saying, “**Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.**” (Acts 2:38-39)

Then, in Galatians 3, the apostle Paul writes to born again believers: ²⁷ “**You are ALL God’s children through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷ for ALL who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. ²⁸ There is no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are ALL ONE in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs of the promise.**” And that my friends should settle it. If you belong to Christ you are His, no matter what nationality you are or what heritage you share or what culture you came from.

God came calling to be with us so we can be with Him - forever. He is called Emmanuel. His name is Jesus.

And He is calling still - so, I’m motivated to ask, “*Have you answered His call?*” If not, don’t ignore it thinking it’s a wrong number. God has a message of love and salvation for you. If you don’t quite understand that, “*Para Espanol, o prima dos.*”