

IMMANUEL—GOD WITH US

Matthew 1:1-25

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). (v. 23)

Merry Christmas! This year was a difficult one for all of us, especially for those who suffered due to the pandemic. Our Lord Jesus foretold that many a calamity like this would happen as history is moving toward his glorious Second Coming. Is God with us? Certainly, he is! Immanuel--God With Us is a central theme in the prophecies of Isaiah, and in a broader sense, the whole Bible. In the birth of Jesus the Messiah, Matthew saw the ultimate fulfillment of Immanuel. As we celebrate Christmas 2020, let's think about what it meant for Jesus to come to this earth to be with us and how we enjoy his presence in our lives today. May the Holy Spirit fill our souls with the grace of Immanuel.

I. The Coming Of The Savior King Jesus

Matthew starts his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah. Read verse 1; “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.” What did Matthew want to communicate through this headline? God had promised to Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation,... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.” (Gen 12:2a; 22:18) God revealed his vision of raising his glorious church from all nations by sending the Messiah through Abraham. Meanwhile, David was the greatest king who conquered all surrounding enemies and ruled his people with justice and righteousness. God promised him, “...I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body...and I will establish his kingdom forever.” (2 Sam 7:12-13) David was a shadow of the Messiah, God's eternal Savior King. Abraham and David both loved God. Their acts of faith and obedience remain forever as beautiful love stories with God. Matthew tells us that God's history belongs to men and women of faith and obedience. God has carried out his world redemptive work through his covenant with them.

Verses 2-17 reveal how God was with his people Israel over a period of 2,000 years. David's kingdom declined and finally came to an end due to her sins. Nevertheless, God did not turn his back on his promises to Abraham and David. Not only did he preserve a remnant of faithful believers in every generation, including the Gentiles like Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth, he continued to flesh out his world redemptive plan with increasingly wondrous glimpses of the Messiah's glory through the prophets.

Verse 22 says, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.” The prophecy of Immanuel was given during the reign of King Ahaz in a time of crisis for the southern kingdom of Judah. At that time, the allied army of the northern kingdom of Israel and Aram attacked Jerusalem. It happened due to the sin and rebellion of the king and his people. However, God sent the Prophet Isaiah to tell the king that God would protect Judah and the invading enemies would soon perish. Then God said, “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all” (Isa 7:9b). To help the fearful king and people turn to God and stand in faith, God was

mindful of giving them a sign. But King Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, because he had his own plan to ask for help from the Assyrians. Then God said through Isaiah, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isa 7:14). This was a revelation that the promised Messiah, who was of divine origin, would be born of a virgin to be with his people. Isn’t it amazing that this wonderful promise was given to an evil king and his people in such a dark time?

In spite of their sinfulness, God was with his people because of his great faithfulness to keep his covenant with their forefathers. If God is with us, who can stand against us? The real problem of the king and the people was their failure to believe that God was really with them. Throughout biblical history, God never left his people. Today the pandemic and an uncertain future make many people fearful. May God, by his mercy, bring an end to this situation soon! If this pandemic ended today, would the world be a better place? The Lord said that the world will become an increasingly ungodly and hostile place as its end draws near. Nevertheless, we have nothing to fear, for God is with us! We have no control over COVID or ungodly men; but God is on the throne! Therefore, we, God’s people, must stand firm in our faith, no matter the situation. Our children will live in a world more difficult than the world today. We are doing what is best when we prayerfully plant the word of God in their hearts and help them to live by faith in the Almighty God, not by sight. Praise God who always gives us victory through faith in Him!

Now let’s go to the Christmas account of Matthew. When the time had fully come to fulfill the prophecy of Immanuel, God chose Mary, a virgin. The most amazing miracle of the incarnation of the Son of God occurred in her womb through the Holy Spirit. However, this made Joseph, her fiancé, the most troubled groom in history. Jesus’ coming into their lives was not without life-shaking pains. Look at verses 20-21, “But after he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph 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. 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.’” The name Jesus means “the LORD saves.” The angel emphasized that Jesus the Messiah is none other than God Incarnate who came to save his people from their sins.

These days, many people think that sin is an old word. But the bad news that overflows in this world demonstrates the iron power of sin that rules individuals and society. Sin is like a cancer inherited by all humans. Sin cut humankind’s relationship with God, the source of life, and damaged God’s image in people. Sin brought curse and death. The worldwide mortality rate of COVID19 is reported to be 2.3 %. But the mortality rate of sin is 100 %. As a result, human life degenerated to a meaningless toil all the way to the grave. But the grave is not humans’ final destination. All unsaved sinners are to face the second death—eternal separation from God in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Rev 21:8). All people need salvation. God, out of his great love and compassion, sent the promised Savior Jesus.

The true Savior must be able to solve humans’ sin problem and have power to conquer our most formidable enemies--the power of death and Satan. Matthew testifies that Jesus’ coming was the fulfillment of God’s promises to send such a Savior King. During the Old Testament era, God taught the seriousness of sin and provided a way of forgiveness through animal sacrifice. But the

blood of animals couldn't sanctify people from their sins. It was the image of the blood of the Son of God Incarnate. Romans 8:3-4 say, "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." On the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). Jesus' prayer reveals why he was crucified—to bring forgiveness to sinners and liberate them from sin's condemnation. Thus, he opened a new and living way for us to confidently approach God and for the Holy Spirit to come to dwell in us (Heb 10:20). On the third day, he rose from the dead so that we may die with him to sin and rise with him to live a new life by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ro 6:4). In this way, he solved our sin problem and saved us from the power of death and Satan.

Now let's think about why the Savior King Jesus is Immanuel-God With Us.

II. The Power and Grace of Immanuel Jesus

Read verse 23; "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us')" Who is Jesus that he is called Immanuel-God with us? The identity of the Messiah was best revealed in Isaiah 9:6; "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The titles of the Messiah tell us why Jesus is God with us.

Having become a man from heaven and experienced all human sufferings, Jesus can empathize with anyone and counsel them with God's unsearchable wisdom and understanding (Isa 11:2). Apart from God, all humans are like sheep who have gone astray (Isa 53:6). As our Wonderful Counselor, he shows us how we should live and what we should live for. He shows us the way to the Father. His words are full of the Spirit and life to make us wise, holy and righteous (Jn 6:63). As the all-powerful, Mighty God who conquered the power of death and Satan, he frees us from any fear and demonic influence. With all authority in heaven and on earth, he now controls history. At the same time, every person needs fatherly love, care, provision, and discipline to grow up as a healthy person. Our human fathers do their best but have great limitations. But Jesus is our Everlasting Father, because he is our Creator and life-giver (Jn 1:4). He cares for us, provides for us without fail, and leads us to grow in his image through all things. Jesus has brought peace by reconciling us with God and with our fellow man. Jesus gives us peace by healing all our wounds through what he suffered. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (Jn 14:27) When our hearts are troubled, we must go to Jesus to receive his peace.

What a wonderful Savior and Lord! This all wise, all powerful, all caring, and all peaceful God is with us! In Immanuel Jesus, we lack nothing. Amen!

In his gospel, Matthew testifies to how Jesus manifested his power and grace of Immanuel to individuals, beginning with himself. Matthew was known as Levi the tax-collector, the scum of Jewish society (Mk 2:14). His career tells us he was a hard-hearted man who pursued wealth at

any cost. In his pursuit of money, he abandoned his spiritual heritage, national identity and self-esteem. He thought that wealth would make him happy. But the inner cry of his conscience must have driven him to unbearable shame and guilt. When he lost God, he lost himself. He is a representative of all men trying to find something other than God which will make them happy. Then one day, Levi heard the most amazing words from Jesus' lips, "Follow me." "Me?" Levi stood up, totally struck. We can imagine Levi bursting into tears in Jesus' arms. Since then, Jesus was with Matthew as his Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. In Matthew 8:17, Matthew quoted Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah, "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Isa 53:4). Jesus took up Levi's sin-sickness so that his deep selfishness and fear of insecurity were healed. Jesus was with him until he was fully restored and became St. Matthew.

In Jesus, Matthew found his true self as an absolutely valuable person made in the image of God. In the Sermon on the Mount, he recorded Jesus' beautiful teaching about God's care for each person and the highest moral standards of love and respect for one another. Once Matthew sought first money. But he found his life's purpose and the secret of real security in Jesus' words, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt 6:33). Most of all, he found the supreme treasure. Wow! We all love to have treasure. In Matthew 13:44-46, Matthew recorded Jesus' parable that is unique to his gospel; "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went, and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." The gist of this parable is the supreme value of the kingdom of God. In Jesus are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3). Anyone who finds the treasure in Jesus will joyfully pay any cost to possess his kingdom. This is what Matthew, the former tax-collector, did. While Matthew found the supreme treasure in Jesus, he also found God in Jesus who so loved him that he sold his everything--his heavenly glory as God and even his life as a man—in order to purchase a lost sinner like him to be his treasured possession.

Matthew could not forget Jesus' grace of Immanuel. So when he later recorded the names of the Apostles, he added "the tax collector" after his name (Mt 10:3). Tradition says that Matthew preached the gospel of Jesus the Messiah in Ethiopia, Macedonia and Parthia. Some say that he was martyred and others say that he finished his natural life. His end is not important. The most important thing is that Matthew entered into an eternal love relationship with God. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb 13:8). Jesus who was with Matthew is with you and me today. I can confess that Matthew's story is my story. It is and can be your story too.

Like Matthew, I was a born hard worker with great faithfulness in what I did. My family became so poor that my parents could not support my schooling. I studied hard and finished my education beyond elementary school through scholarships and governmental support. Unlike Matthew, however, I was not shrewd in my social life. I had worldly friends and used to spend time and money with them. Apart from God, I would have lived as a hard-working sinner, wasting my precious one life to please people. By his great mercy, God led me to UBF Bible study. During my early group Bible study led by M. Maria Ahn, I heard the voice of my Everlasting Father Jesus calling me, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick....For I have not come to call the

righteous, but sinners” (Mt 9:12-13). My Savior King Jesus washed away my dirty sins by his blood and gave me a new life and a new name, Shepherd Abraham. Since then, I served his calling with my God-given faithfulness.

When I was a student missionary at Oregon State, I met a crisis when my professor forced me to choose between my Ph. D and campus ministry. In my prayers, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, gave me peace by helping me to entrust everything unto his hands. So, I could boldly choose campus ministry. Then the Mighty God Jesus enabled me to finish Ph. D study under another professor. And during this time, he called and raised Pastor Ron as his servant. I thank God for the late Dr. Samuel Lee and M. Sarah Barry who loved and prayed for Pastor Ron and myself like their own sons. Upon my return to Korea, I decided to become a B professor in order to be an A shepherd. But God made me both an A shepherd and an A professor. Through all this, my Wonderful Counselor Jesus taught me that his promise in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” is the truth by which I should live. My Everlasting Father Jesus has been with me until a born hard worker could be changed into a man who lives by faith, and a self-centered man could be transformed into a man who can love anyone. I thank God for giving me a God-loving wife, Sarah, and perfecting our marriage and lives through serving God’s mission together. As we look back, all the Lord’s manifestations of his love and power in response to our faith and devotion remain as truly beautiful memories and fill us with great joy and thanksgiving. King Jesus saved me from a meaningless, wasted life, and made me bear fruit that lasts.

Which leads us to the final part of today’s passage. Look at verses 24-25, “When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.” Joseph and Mary were ordinary country couple who would have been among the innumerable people who married, lived and died namelessly. But their acts of faith and obedience remain forever as a beautiful love story with God. Jesus the Messiah came to their lives and perfected their marriage and lives by making them eternally blessed and honored. Jesus the Messiah makes all of our acts of faith and obedience to him eternally beautiful and honorable.

This year, some of you may have experienced hardships and sorrows, even the loss of a loved one among your family members or close friends. For you, I’d like to share the Lord’s words of comfort, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn 15:33). The Lord Jesus, Immanuel, humbly came to experience all our sufferings and sorrows and has overcome for us. In his time, he will turn all our sufferings and sorrows into everlasting bliss. “They will call him Immanuel—God With Us” God gave his one and only Son to save us from our sins and to be with us as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. He is and ever will be with you and me. The Bible theme of Immanuel ends with the revelation of a new heaven and a new earth, which says, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ----- The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city..... They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” (Rev 21:3, 22:3-4) We will see our Lord Jesus face to face, and we will live with him and our heavenly Father forever.