

# God With Us

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0:00] Please return to Matthew chapter 1 with me and the words we find in verse 23. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Names don't really mean much in our society. They're not unimportant, but they don't tend to mean anything really. We give our children their names because, well, we like the sound of it, or we admire someone who has that name, or it's been given to the family for generations.

I'd hope that nobody who gives their child the name Jade thinks that that baby looks like a geological specimen or wants her to grow up into a very hard rock.

In many societies, a person's name is far more meaningful. For example, in Chinese society, parents carefully think through what a name means before giving it to their child.

Chinese students who've been in our church over the years gave themselves English names because it would have been very difficult for us in the West to get our mouths around their proper Chinese names.

[1:19] But if you should take the time to ask them their Chinese name and what it means, you'll get an eye-opener because, like it's not, their name means something beautiful.

The Jesus whose birth we remember at Christmas had many names and every one of them means something. Whether it's Jesus, God saves, or Christ, the King, the study of the names of Jesus might give you a really interesting holiday project.

One of the names of Jesus that we don't focus on nearly enough, except at Christmas, is Emmanuel. In Matthew 1.23, the angel who appears to Joseph quotes the prophet Isaiah when he says, The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel.

From 700 BC, Jesus was destined to have a beautiful name. The name Emmanuel. Now as the text tells us, Emmanuel means something.

God with us. I wondered if Jesus ever referred to himself as Emmanuel when he was asked what his name was.

[2:36] What should we understand by the name Emmanuel? What are we to understand about the sense in which Jesus is God with us? Well, it seems to me as we edge ever closer to Christmas Day, where our minds and our hearts are drawn to that stable in Bethlehem, Jesus' name Emmanuel means at least three things.

First, God was with us. Second, God is with us. Third, God will be with us. God, first of all, was with us.

He was with us. As you work your way through the nativity story, especially the announcements of the angels, you realize simply the most amazing thing. Namely, that the child laid in the manger, the baby in his mother's arms, is no less than God himself.

The most famous of all the Christmas carols, O come all ye faithful, could not be more direct than when it says of Jesus that he is God of God.

Another famous carol, Hark the Herald Angels, sing, talks of Jesus, veiled in flesh the Godhead see. Hail the incarnate deity.

[3:59] The Orthodox Christian church, based firmly on the teaching of scripture, has always believed and confessed that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh.

And so, in the first instance, when the angel refers to Jesus as Emmanuel, we believe that he is referring to this particular truth, that God himself was with us, and that his name was Jesus Christ.

You know, when someone's going through a hard time in life, we might say to them, you know, I'm with you. And what we mean by that is that we're right behind them.

They can count on us for support. We believe in them. We don't necessarily mean that we are there in person with them. But when Jesus is called God with us, the angel means no such thing.

Rather, he is referring to how Jesus is God in the flesh. In this instance, when he says that Jesus is God with us, he does not mean it metaphorically on right behind you.

[5:11] He means it literally. The great Anglo-Catholic Henry Bramwell wrote the Christmas hymn. We don't sing this because it's quite difficult to sing.

The great God of heaven is come down to earth. And he did not come down in the abstract. He came in reality. Not in spirit, but in flesh.

It's one thing for us to assure a person who's going through a hard time that we're with them in spirit. But it's an altogether higher and more satisfying truth that we're with them in body.

That we're holding their hands. That we've got our arms around their shoulders. That we're there to listen. And so this child, this baby whose birth we celebrate at Advent, is none other than God with us.

Isn't this simply the most amazing news? The greatest truth of yesterday's news and tomorrow's news. Have we lost our wonder and our awe at the mystery of what Christian theologians call the hypostatic union?

[6:24] Namely, how in this one person, Jesus Christ, there were two natures, divine and human. Clement Moore wrote the poem, Well, he hadn't been to many Christian houses.

But on the night before Christmas, silence gives way to praise. And a stirring mouse to a singing Christian, amazed at the truth of how that baby could be God with us.

God with us was born in a stable because there was no room in the inn. Mary and Joseph saw his firstborn appearance and wiped the vernix from his body. They heard the first cries of God with us. The shepherds saw God in the flesh and they rejoiced greatly. Wise men came from the east to worship him and bring him gifts. Herod tried to murder God with us in the slaughter of the innocents. God with us, the divine human person, lived in relative obscurity in the Galilean village of Nazareth until he burst onto the national scene with great works and words of power.

[7:44] God cried out in the ears of the people, The kingdom of heaven is near. Repent and believe the gospel. God with us looked deep into a leper's heart and felt great compassion for him.

God himself subjected himself to the wicked temptations of Satan, to the mockery of men, to the opposition of the demonic powers. God himself preached love and righteousness and grace, offering salvation to all regardless of their backgrounds, on the basis not of their works, but of their faith.

His opponents mockingly called God with us, the friend of sinners, but even they had to admit that they'd never heard anyone teach like this man had.

His friends were devoted to him and they often said to one another, Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did. God with us subjected himself to the sham trial of the national leadership and to the weakness of Pilate's leadership.

God with us allowed himself to be beaten and tortured, to be spat on and insulted, and then in the final act of human brutality and hatred, God with us was truly crucified.

[9:10] God with us lay dead in the tomb for three days, his ears unhearing, his heart unbeating, his tongue unspeaking. But then in an act of triumphal victory, God with us, the child whose birth we celebrate this Advent, rose on the third day, breaking the chains of death and ascended into heaven.

And I guess I'm saying three things very briefly in this point. First, never, ever, ever lose your amazement at the truth that Jesus, the child whose birth we celebrate, is both God and man.

If we have already lost our sense of wonder, let's get it back. By pondering the mystery of how it's possible that in the child Jesus, the great God of heaven has come now to earth.

And then secondly, let's not make the mistake of restricting the name Emmanuel to Christmas. Jesus was no less Emmanuel when he was hanging on the cross as when he was lying in the

cradle.

God with us wept at the graveside of his friend Lazarus and longed for the companionship and the friendship of his disciples. And then thirdly, before we get carried away with the materialism of a Western Christmas, let us never forget this fundamental truth that God was physically with us and his name was Jesus.

[10:56] that God walked on the earth, that God experienced everything common to us as human beings, that life is not ordinary when an extraordinary God has lived it before us.

God was with us. His name is Jesus. Secondly, the name Emmanuel means God is with us. God is with us. Of course, this name is one we almost exclusively use of Jesus when we're thinking of his nativity. We don't think of him as Emmanuel when he's still in the storm or feeding the 5,000. We think of him even less as Emmanuel now that having ascended, he's at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly places. God with us is now with God.

The Son is with his Father. What made his birth so amazing is that God had come to be with us. What makes his heavenly session so amazing is that a man has gone to be with God.

[12:12] That Jesus always remains a human being just as surely as he always remains divine. And that's an amazing thought, is it not?

One which almost totally dominated the thought processes of a predecessor of mine in this congregation, John Rabbi Duncan, that at the right hand of God in heaven is my flesh and are my bones.

That he's in the courtroom of heaven and his name is Jesus. And that's the truth. That we are with God in heaven in the person of Jesus just as surely as God was with us on earth in the person of Jesus.

But that's not the truth I want to focus on in this section. While Jesus may no longer be physically with us as once he was, while he is now in heaven and we remain on earth, yet he continues to be God with us.

He is with us. He continues to be ever present among his people. And no matter how hard, no matter what we try and no matter what we do, he will never leave nor abandon his people.

[13:38] That's the promise he made to his disciples all those years ago when just before his ascension he said to them, I am with you always even to the very end of the age.

He did not say to them, I will be with you. As if to say that at some point in the future he would begin to be with them. And he did not say I was with you as if to imply that he would no longer be with them.

He said I am with you. He's with his people past, present and future. The very same Jesus who was lying in his mother's arms is the Jesus who was with us as Glasgow City Free Church in its previous incarnations in 1843 when we became a free church.

or is with us today as Glasgow City Free Church. He is not present with us physically. His physical body is in heaven at the right hand of the Father but he is as present with us through his Holy Spirit. And if we should think that somehow his presence today with us is less significant because he's not present with us physically we're mistaken. When us in his earthly ministry as a man he could only ever be outside us other to us even as I am to you.

[15:02] Now by his spirit he is in us. God is not merely man to man with us. He is with us heart to heart.

He lives with his people. He's with us on the inside. And that's better isn't it? That Jesus is with us today in a more powerfully pervasive and personal and pastoral way than he even was with his disciples.

The Jesus who his mother held close to her heart is the Jesus who lovingly hold you close to his heart.

and that's simply amazing is it not? That Jesus is closer to us today than our loved ones because for as much as we love them they will only ever be outside us whereas Jesus is inside us.

He's inside us in our joys wild Prozent and in our sorrows he's made his home in our hearts. He's with us in our pleasures and in our pains he has made his home in our hearts he's with us in our company and our loneliness he has made his home in our hearts he is with us in goodness and in evil he has made his home in our hearts he is with us in courage and in fear he has made his home

in our hearts he is with us in darkness and light he has made his home in our hearts God was and by his spirit is with his people and that's a tremendous comfort to us is it not I may be going through hard times this Christmas but I'm not going through them alone because Jesus name continues to be Emmanuel some of us here are not looking forward to Christmas this year because it brings back painful memories of those we have lost or as it forces us to look forward to the prospect of family arguments or credit card debts or even of loneliness and abuse but for the Christian even though we may not look forward to Christmas we look forward not alone because by his spirit [17:51] Emmanuel has made his home in our hearts but it also gives us tremendous confidence does it not the joy we have in family and in friends and food and the pleasure we experience at Christmas is a joy doubled because Christ is present with us the Christ who gave us all these things richly to enjoy on Christmas day when we wake up to the voices of our excited children probably half past one in the morning we too wake up with excitement for this day because this day beyond all other days is an opportunity to worship Christ for his mysterious birth his magnificent love and his majestic crucifixion we shall grasp the opportunity to worship him that day because without him there would be no good news in which to rejoice no forgiveness of sin through his sacrifice on our behalf no victory over death through his resurrection

Jesus remains Emmanuel he is with us even as he's promised to be and we have experienced him to be in the past we don't celebrate alone for the joy of that birth has only grown in significance over the years until it reaches a crescendo in our hearts and on Christmas day we simply must praise him or the very stones of the earth would cry out we love his name Emmanuel because it reminds us that not only was he with us but he is with us today and I guess again I'm seeing a couple of things here first of all remember this for fair or for foul on Christmas day you are not alone God is with you he's made his home in your heart it is neither an opportunity to lose your head nor your heart it is neither a time for a loss of self-control or a lack of self-hope and secondly remember that Jesus is no guest at your family celebrations in fact it's his presence with us that allows us to truly celebrate since as families we have him in common between us he belongs there more surely than I do for it's in his honour and by his blessing we eat drink and enjoy each other his presence with us doubles our joys and halves our sorrows for God is with us

God was with us God is with us and then finally and briefly God will always be with us God will be with us recently on Sunday mornings we've been working our way here in Glasgow City through Matthew 24 and Jesus prophecies concerning the end times and we've heard Jesus talking about wars and rumours of wars of tribulations of the destruction of Jerusalem of his coming in majestic glory and of the sound of a great trumpet perhaps for some of us these studies were illuminating and helped us to understand things that previously we had not for others like myself probably we're still at a bit of a loss to know what the end times shall bring but what we do know at its most basic level is this

God will be with us the son of God who rips open the sky and judges the living and the dead is the Emmanuel who was born in the stable and was lying in his mother's arms the apostle John in his great apocalyptic vision heard a heard a loud voice from heaven's throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man and he will live with them they will be his people God himself will be with them he will be their God what we do know at its most basic level is that the future for us as Christians is the witness of God he shall be with us everlastingly continuing as our Emmanuel God with us God with us with us his disciples in the flesh by his spirit he has made his home in our hearts but the day is coming when he shall be with all his people both body and spirit and we shall see him just as he is then shall Emmanuel be fulfilled

God with us eternally and completely what this shall be like we don't know but we know it shall be just as Jesus said it would God's dwelling will be with us we shall be his people and for us that's never going to grow tired every day every day think of this every day waking up in the new heavens and the new earth if we shall ever do such a thing as sleep there the first thought in our mind shall be the name Emmanuel God is with me I guess names don't mean much in our society but they do in heavens especially this one because it shall remind us if ever we need reminding I don't really think we will that God's with us eternally there may be some of us as Christians who feel very far away from God right now or feel as if God is very far away from us it's as if to use the words of the

psalmist who we love

[24:16] God has hidden his face from us for a time we're not experiencing the closeness of his presence or his comfort with us we feel somewhat abandoned rather forsaken the wonderful truth of Emmanuel is that our fickle feelings cannot destroy the reality that God was with us he is with us and he will be with us always is this angel lying or is he proclaiming the truth is Jesus name Emmanuel or is it not very briefly as we close there may be some of us here today for whom the truth that God was with us and that his name is Jesus is either irrelevant or at best an inconvenience he cramps our style he spoils our fun does he really does he really or does he invite us today to put our faith and trust in him to realize and to understand that there is no greater joy conceivable than that of knowing and being with Jesus that by his cross and resurrection he has destroyed sin and death and all he does is to call on us to believe in him will you will you believe in Emmanuel today will you call him your Emmanuel that he may call you his Christian let us pray