

# Matthew 1:23 (Christmas Eve)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Lord, as we come to your word now in this account of the birth of your son, Lord, will you take this familiar story and Lord, fill it again with new meaning.

And Lord, may the wonderful news of it resound deeply in our hearts. As we see a story of your goodness and your love for your world, for us.

Lord, I would pray that you would encourage us tonight by your word in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, it is great to see you all here tonight.

I don't know about you, but I love the Christmas season. It's always encouraging to see people be a little bit cheerier walking down the streets. It's always beautiful to drive through the Broadway section and see all the Christmas lights that they have put up and to walk through the mall if you dare to get to a mall and to hear cheerful songs over the Muzak, whether it's Mariah Carey saying, all I want for Christmas is you, or Frank Sinatra singing, have yourself a merry little Christmas. It's a wonderful time of the year. And there is something even in our culture that makes it a slightly happier time for many of us. And I don't know about you, but I hope you enjoy it.

[ 1 : 39 ] And you know, for those of us who are Christians, as we gather together, the hymns we were just singing double down on the joy of this season. They tell us that this season is joy to the world, peace on earth, goodwill towards men.

And it is a message of great hope and of great optimism about the state of the world and about what life can be like here.

And so it's true that in many ways, Christmas truly can be the most wonderful time of the year. But there is an empty underside.

Maybe you feel it tonight. For some of us, we may be carrying losses that make even the joys bittersweet, even the happiness of gatherings hollow.

Even if you're not carrying a grief like that during this season, it's not hard to look into the darkness and to see how the stress of this season can cause you to be grumpier rather than more happy.

[ 2 : 47 ] That the happiness around you can exacerbate the darkness that you feel in your own soul as you battle depression. As you read the news and you think, peace on earth seems like further and further from our reality rather than closer and closer.

The hymn writers, of course, knew this as well. When they sing about the coming of Jesus, they long for a day when the gloomy clouds of night will be dispersed and death's dark shadows will be put to flight.

So Christmas is an interesting season, isn't it? Because it's filled with joy and light and happiness and yet has this dark underside, this thing that we don't like to acknowledge and yet is so often a part of our own experience and our own life.

What do we do with that? Cognitive dissonance between the message of the Muzak and sometimes the message of our hearts.

I think we can sometimes turn to cynicism. Yeah? Bah humbug on you. Merry Christmas. Maybe some of us, with great hope, just seek to block out all the darkness.

[ 4 : 15 ] It's not really there. We deny it and try to go on hoping, hoping that really it will be full of wonder and light and goodness without any other things.

But I think that, in fact, the narrative of Christmas can help us navigate this cognitive dissonance, this darkness and light with a much greater depth.

And so I want to spend just a few minutes tonight meditating on the story that Kyle read in Matthew, the account of the birth of Jesus. And as always is true, there's such a richness to these stories.

I want to focus in, even particularly, on the name of Emmanuel and to think about what that means for us. As we think about this passage in Matthew, we need to start by being reminded that Matthew

begins his account of the birth of Jesus, not with this, but right before, if you look back at the very beginning of the book, it's a genealogy.

It's a genealogy that, for any Jewish person, for any one of God's people in the first century, they would have read this as the history of their life and nation.

[ 5 : 32 ] It would be like reading about Washington and Adams and Abraham Lincoln and FDR and so forth up to this day. And yet it had this spiritual undertone as well of this is the history of God's people.

And so the story is infused with all of God's promises, all of God's promises about how he will call a people to himself from every tribe and tongue and nation to lift it up, to be God's people in this world.

The promise is that they would be his people and he would be their God and that he would be among them and be in their midst. And yet the people in the first century wondered where is the fulfillment of these promises?

Rome rules our country. The priesthood seems to be compromised. And where is God with us right now?

And it's into that context that the story of the baby Jesus steps in.

[ 6 : 40 ] We've just read about it. We've just sung about it. This baby who came claimed, it was claimed that he was the fulfillment of the prophecies way back in the prophet Isaiah looking forward to a day when God would actually come and dwell with his people in a new way.

That God would be with us. And to understand the meaning of this, I wanted to spend a few minutes painting for you the whole picture of the Bible to see how wonderfully good this news is for us.

Because when you go back to the very beginning of the story in the Bible, you see humanity, man and woman, living together in a place of perfect provision, in a place of perfect goodness.

And the most wonderful thing about it all is that they lived with God and God lived with them. He walked with them in the cool of the day is the literary picture that is given to us of the nearness and of the unfettered and unhindered relationship with God in creation.

And you know, I think this is why we love Christmas a little bit. Because Christmas reminds us that this is the way it was supposed to be. It was supposed to be all good with no darkness at all.

[ 8 : 11 ] It was supposed to be joy and merriment because we would be with God. But as we read on, we see that this in fact is not how the story went.

Because humanity in its discontent with God and its desire to be like God rebelled against God and rejected Him. And in that rejection, which is the root of our sin, our proud refusal of God with us, came deadly consequences.

Death, strife, envy, conflicts, murder, war. And the greatest consequence of all was our separation from God.

We were no longer able to be with God because we had rejected Him. We had refused Him. And yet you see through the rest of the Old Testament, the Bible tells us God did not give up.

God did not give up on having a people who would be His own. And the whole Old Testament can be pictured as God's loving pursuit of His people and His calling of special people to be His.

[ 9 : 26 ] And in fact, there are ways in which God showed, I will be with you, I want to be with you throughout the whole narrative. And yet always, there was a mix.

And what we experience today is what they experienced then. This mix of hopefulness that these promises may come true and yet the reality that they are not fully true now.

So into this context, in the first century, when the people of God were saying, God, where are you? Are you really with us? Are you really for us? A baby was born.

In a manger, he was laid to a carpenter and his wife in an obscure town. And yet, everyone who saw this baby knew that it was something special.

Mary and Joseph, they knew. Elizabeth and the baby in Elizabeth's womb who became John the Baptist, he knew before he was even out of the womb.

[ 10 : 39 ] Persian wise men from far away knew. Shepherds, watching their flocks by night on the hillsides, knew.

They knew that this baby was something special. And that in him, God had come to earth. And God had come not just to sympathize with us, but he came to identify with us.

He came to enter into the darkness of the world that we live in. He came from more than that. Not only did he enter in to identify with us in that way, but he came to deliver us.

This is the most wonderful news. These are the two names that we see Matthew giving him. Emmanuel, God with us, and Jesus. For he will save his people from their sins.

This baby grew up and instead of rejecting God, he lived in a perfect relationship with God. Instead of seeking to rival God, he submitted himself as an obedient servant to God.

[ 11 : 48 ] Instead of seeking life apart from God, he offered himself up to death in order to give us life. And in doing so, at his point of offering himself up to death, he took the rejection of the Father that we deserved and he bestowed upon us the perfect favor that he had with God.

He saved us from our sin and God and sinners are now reconciled because of him to all who believe.

And so the word that Emmanuel, God with us, is here tonight is good news. It's good news because it means the darkness will not win.

God has not abandoned us, but he has come for us. It means that your sin and your distance from God and your rejection of him need not be the last word in your life, but that in fact he has come for you and calls you to embrace him and to respond and to turn to him and to receive him.

Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Lord will enter in. God has come to rescue us and to bring to us the goodness that we so long for and so hunger for and so love when we taste this goodness, the joy of every longing heart, the dear desire of every nation.

[ 13 : 38 ] This is Jesus. And all the trappings of Christmas, all the presents and all the lights and all the feasts and all the family gatherings, their richness ultimately is because they point us to this ultimate goodness that God is with us.

The Bible story looks ahead. It says we're not there yet. Though God has come to be with us, though he has lived and died and rose again, he is not yet finished with this world.

And so we live in this tension still and yet we look ahead with hope. In the book of Revelation at the end, it says this, I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them. And they will be his people and he will be there. He and God himself will be with them as their God.

And he will wipe away every tear from their eye. And death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore.

[ 15 : 06 ] For the former things have passed away and he who is seated on the throne say, Behold, I am making all things new. And friends, this is what Christmas, God with us, points us to.

That that day is coming because he has come. It is not a wishful hope. It is a certain future reality for us. That just as God has come to us in the fallenness to redeem us out of this world, yet in fact what he will do is he will come again to renew this world.

And all the things that we long for and all the things that we hope for and all the things that Christmas celebrates are but an echo of what we will taste that day when the dwelling place of God will be with man and woman and child for eternity.

and so sing your, have yourself a merry little Christmas. Enjoy your who hash and who beast and roast beast.

Gather around the tree and think of the presents given and received. but remember that all of this is meant to remind us of God who came to be with us so that we could be with him.

[ 16 : 50 ] Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for Jesus who has come, Emmanuel, who has come with us, come to us, to ransom us and redeem us and rescue us.

Lord, thank you for the good news of this. Lord, we do pray that as we celebrate this Christmas season, Lord, that the joy and the wonder and the awe of it would be ours in all richness.

Lord, thank you for this celebration. we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, if you've been here for the last couple of years, we don't typically do this, but we're going to try lighting some candles tonight.

So, as we continue to celebrate the worship of Christ, maybe the ushers can come up at this point, we're going to do a little bit of candle lighting.

And the reason is because Scripture talks about Jesus coming as a light coming into the darkness of this world. And as He did so, He brought all that we've just been talking about for a few minutes.

[ 18 : 19 ] So, this is what we're going to do. I'm going to read the Scriptures. I'm going to light the candle. Tyler and Melissa are going to come up the rose and they're going to pass the light out from here to all of you.

Okay? So, here are a few tips so we don't light each other on fire. So, if your candle is lit, it should always stay upright.

If your candle is unlit, you take your unlit candle and you light it from the lit candle. Once it is lit, you hold it upright be careful of clothing and hair in front of you.

And as we do this, we will be able to enjoy the symbolism of what John 1 tells us about the coming of Jesus. So, is that clear how we're going to do this?

All right. Well, let me read. Our last reading for the evening is from the Gospel of John, chapter 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

[ 19 : 29 ] He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through Him.

He was not the light but came to bear witness about the light. The true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world and the world was made through Him yet the world did not know Him.

He came to His own and His own people did not receive Him but to all who did. but to all who did receive Him who believed in His name He gave the right to become children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth.

[ 20 : 49 ] we light this candle to remember as a symbol of Jesus the light of the world. I'll do this with you.

Silent night Holy night All is calm All is bright Round yon Virgin Mother and child Holy infant So tender and mild sleep in heavenly peace Sleep in heavenly peace Sleep in heavenly peace Silent night Holy night

Shepherds quake Shepherds quake At the sun Glories stream From heaven afar Heavenly hosts Heavenly hosts Alleluia Christ the Savior Christ the Savior Is born Christ the Savior Is born Christ the Savior Is born Silent night Silent night Holy night Wondrous star Let my light With the angels Let us sing Let us sing Let us sing Alleluia To our King Christ the Savior Christ the Savior Is born Christ the Savior Is born Christ the Savior Is born Silent night Holy night Son of God Love's pure light Radiant beams From thy holy face

With the dawn Of redeeming grace Jesus Lord At thy birth Jesus Lord At thy birth Well friends thank you for joining us this evening please join us tomorrow morning if you'd like 10 o'clock for our Christmas morning service and now may the joy of Emmanuel God with us bring light and life to you as you celebrate with remembrance his birth this night go in peace church hoer had

[ 25 : 28 ] King the love Thank you.