

Immanuel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 December 2009

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] Well, Christmas has passed, and I wonder what remains of the Christmas celebrations.

I wonder how many of you, even today, for lunch, will be having some of the leftovers, or maybe Boxing Day was sufficient to make use of them all.

I don't know. I imagine those of us who put up a tree will presumably still have it. It will remain into the new year, I imagine. And perhaps for some, the credit card bill is in the post or will soon be in the post.

That's something to worry about on another day. But what have the events celebrated now that Christmas has passed and we look ahead to the new year and a new year and all the preparations and all the celebrations of Christmas are left behind.

What of the event itself? What of the birth of Jesus? This morning I want to consider a name given to Jesus that reminds us of the continuing significance of the coming of Jesus.

[1 : 22] Not just as today, a couple of days after Christmas, but even as we consider the two millennia that have passed since His birth.

In Matthew chapter 1 and verse 22, we read as follows, And I want to think of this name that is given to Jesus, Emmanuel.

This prophecy that Matthew quotes from the prophet Isaiah. Who is Emmanuel? Now, I think that is such an obvious question or an obvious answer, but there can be room for confusion.

One young lad who shall remain nameless heard this name Emmanuel as he was listening to a Christmas carol and was fascinated to discover that an Arsenal footballer was part of the Christmas story.

Now, those of you who don't know much about football, that reference will be lost on you. But there is or can be room for confusion. And so, to clarify any doubt, we, of course, as we consider the passage in which this prophecy is quoted, we identify Emmanuel with the child born, with Jesus.

[3 : 06] And indeed, the meaning of the name Emmanuel is clear. Matthew himself is at pains to make it very clear for us. He gives us the interpretation or the translation there in the verse that we have read.

They will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us or God for us. And though we are told that this child would be given the name Emmanuel, they will call him Emmanuel.

As we continue through the gospel accounts, we don't actually find any occasion when that name is used to call him as the name that we use as we interact socially.

Rather, the name that is mentioned in the previous verse, in verse 21, where again Matthew speaks of a name being given. There in verse 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.

This is the name that was used to address him, and that he used in his social interactions. But then we have this other name, Emmanuel. And given that it wasn't used to address him, or for people to identify him as he grew up, it is clear that this name is given with the purpose of identifying who he is and what he was to do.

[4 : 35] The name serves to identify Jesus as the one in whom finds fulfillment all that the name means and implies.

This name, Emmanuel, God with us. And this morning what I want to do is to consider five truths that we can identify by reference to this name, Emmanuel.

And we will do so briefly, one by one. But before we consider these five truths, I just want to comment on the origin of the name.

We've already mentioned that here in Matthew's Gospel, in chapter 1, the evangelist is quoting from the prophet Isaiah, the chapter that we read a few moments ago in chapter 7, where reference is

made by the prophet of a son to be born, who was to be called Emmanuel.

Now this child, at the time at which Isaiah wrote his prophecy and shared it with the king and with the people in Judah, this son to be born is presented as a ray of hope for Judah, for Jerusalem, who find themselves surrounded by their enemies, in particular by the northern kingdom of Israel and by Syria.

[6 : 02] And they are seeking to destroy Jerusalem, to invade and to take control. And King Ahaz and all the people are in great fear.

They're trembling like the trees tremble in the wind, as we read there in the chapter. And the prophet comes and brings this ray of hope, that a child will be born who will bring deliverance. Sadly, King Ahaz, rather than putting his trust in God and in the promises of God, is rather seeking to form and to forge an alliance with Assyria as the means of support against his enemies. But in the midst of this, there is this prophecy concerning this son to be born called Emmanuel. Now this prophecy and Matthew's use of it has generated considerable debate. And the debate really centers around two elements or two aspects. First of all, there is discussion or debate concerning the meaning of the word translated virgin by Matthew as he makes use of the prophecy.

[7 : 20] And secondly, there is debate concerning the manner and the time of the fulfillment of the prophecy, the original prophecy of Isaiah. And if we can just comment on these things very briefly before moving on to our primary concern, which is to think of the truth that this name presents for us.

Concerning the word virgin, it is true that the Hebrew word used by Isaiah in chapter 7 of Isaiah is a word that can be translated young woman or maiden and not necessarily virgin.

And it's for this reason that those who are quick to criticize or to accuse, accuse Matthew of accommodating the text to suit his purposes. And so he needs to, for his purposes, understand this word to mean virgin because it ties in with his objective.

I still remember. This was, oh, it must have been 30 years ago in an RE class in Galsby High School. And we were looking at some of the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Jesus. And this one was mentioned, that a virgin will give birth. And the teacher who was sympathetic to the biblical account was presenting this along with others as evidence of the truthfulness of the Scriptures.

[8 : 43] And I still remember one of my classmates saying, ah, yes, but that word doesn't actually mean virgin. It means young woman. He'd been reading up. He was obviously keen to have an argument.

And it's interesting how that sticks in my mind, that discussion that arose. However, so to clear this up very quickly, this accusation that is leveled at Matthew can be very easily dismissed.

And it can be easily dismissed for this reason, that in the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament that was produced some 200 years before the events related in Matthew's Gospel, before any of this had happened, in that Greek translation of the Hebrew, the word used by the translators to translate the Hebrew word is a Greek word that means specifically virgin.

So long before the events of Christmas occurred, there was this recognition by these Jewish scholars that the accurate and correct and appropriate translation of the Hebrew word was indeed virgin.

And all Matthew does is quote the word used in that version of the Septuagint, as it is called. Well, simply to clarify that one point of contention that sometimes arises concerning this prophecy.

[10 : 14] But then one other thing, just to mention briefly, concerning its fulfillment. Again, there's much that could be said, but I think it's sufficient to simply state what I think all would be agreed, certainly all Christian commentators and scholars would be agreed, that the ultimate and final fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy is to be found in the birth of Jesus.

That is very clear. But that doesn't remove the possibility, indeed we might say the probability, that Isaiah's original prophecy also found partial fulfillment in Isaiah's day.

Certainly the king and the people in Jerusalem, as they heard this prophecy, would have understood it as being a prophecy relating to their immediate deliverance. And they would have been looking for an immediate fulfillment.

It's not clear how it was fulfilled in that original scenario, context of Isaiah's day. But it seems reasonable to presume that in a manner perhaps not provided for us the information or the facts, it found partial fulfillment.

But it finds complete fulfillment, this prophecy concerning a son to be born who would be called Emmanuel. The full fulfillment, if we can speak in those terms, is to be had and to be found in the birth of Jesus.

[11 : 41] But let's move on to consider briefly five truths revealed by the name. And I'll mention what they are before we consider each in turn. First of all, this name, Emmanuel, this name that is to be given to Jesus, this name, first of all, presupposes a problem.

So take note, or a mental note, first of all, the name presupposes a problem. Secondly, the name declares an intention. Thirdly, the name identifies a person.

Fourthly, the name describes a new reality. And then, fifthly and finally, the name constitutes a promise. These are the five truths that we want to comment on in relation to, in reference to, this name, Emmanuel.

First of all, the name presupposes a problem. You see, the need for one sent by God, named God with us, at the very least, suggests that without His coming and acting, man is without God, or at least far from God.

Without Emmanuel, God is not with us. Or perhaps more solemnly, but also accurately, God is against us, in a very real sense of that phrase.

[13 : 10] Now, in fairness, we have to recognize that the name itself, the name Emmanuel, God with us, does not state this, this problem of humanity.

But it certainly is a problem that the Bible presents very clearly, that man's condition, that man's predicament, is that he is without God, and without hope.

The Bible's clear explanation is that our sin has driven us far from God. And we go back to what happened in the beginning. We go back to the Garden of Eden, that paradise in which Adam and Eve enjoyed what we might call a permanent Emmanuel, a permanent God with us.

And we think of that very vivid language of God walking in the garden with Adam. They live 24-7. Emmanuel, God with us.

But we know what happened. They sinned, and they were cast out, far from the presence of God. In Eden, they could declare, God is with us.

[14 : 22] But outside, their reality changed radically. Their new reality, their new sad and solemn and tragic reality, was God is not with us.

And of course, this is true not only of Adam and Eve long ago, but we have inherited their guilt and corruption and their status. And indeed, in our own lives, we are guilty of the sin that they also committed.

What does Paul remind us of in the third chapter to the Romans? We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Sin alienates us from God. And so, God is not simply not with us, He is against us, as our sin has made us enemies of God.

And the name Emmanuel recognizes that this grave problem exists, but points to one who is to provide a solution.

[15 : 29] So, this is the first thing that we can say. It's not explicitly within the word itself, but certainly the name presupposes that there is this problem that is to find solution in one who can be named and described as God with us.

But the name, secondly, also declares an intention. In the face of man's rebellion and sin, in the light of the enmity that separates us from God and indeed God from us, what is God's response? Does He simply observe this reality impassively? Does He simply sit back and let justice take its course? Does He look on in curiosity at the futile attempts of man to sort out his problem, something that man cannot do?

No, God does not do these things. And the name Emmanuel declares God's intention. It declares God's desire to seek out reconciliation.

It declares God's intention to become friends with His enemies. It declares God's intention to breach the gap that has been created by our sin and rebellion.

[16 : 58] It declares His intention to be a God with us. God does not want to be in conflict with mankind. He does not want to be in conflict with you.

He does not want to be your enemy. He wants to be your friend. He wants to be with you and for you. And this name, Emmanuel, declares eloquently this divine intention.

This name, Emmanuel, grants to us all the hope that what was lost in the garden, that friendship and fellowship with God, can be recovered.

There is hope and this is God's intention. intention. And this name, Emmanuel, God with us, declares that intention. So the name presupposes a problem.

It declares an intention, but the name also identifies a person. If it is indeed so, it is God's intention to seek reconciliation.

[18 : 01] If it is indeed God's desire to make friends of His enemies, the question is, how will He achieve this? How will this be done? How will God secure this reconciliation?

How will He bridge the gap? Well, the coming of Jesus, the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, demonstrates to us the radical manner in which God has achieved this intention.

He has come to this world in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. the divine intention of reconciliation, of friendship with an alienated humanity, has taken flesh in the person of Jesus. Born of a virgin, a man, but not any man, for born of a virgin, we are told of the very miraculous nature of His conception.

So, a man, but also God, very God, a very God. the Son of God and the Son of Man at one at the same time. One person, two natures.

[19 : 15] And so, Jesus is coming into this world, the incarnation of the Son of God. His very person is a powerful visual aid that speaks of God's initiative in coming to our encounter.

nature, this mysterious and irreversible union of God and man. And so, Jesus is Emmanuel. This name identifies the person, identifies the one entrusted by the Father to secure this reconciliation. He is the way by which we can enter into a new relationship of friendship with God. He is the way and He is the only way.

So, this name, Emmanuel, identifies a person by whom God will secure this divine purpose of reconciling men and women to Himself.

Emmanuel. But we can say something further concerning this name, Emmanuel. And it is this, that the name describes a new reality.

[20 : 31] With the birth of Jesus, the plan is carried out. And the whole world finds itself in a new situation. And this new situation can be described as Emmanuel, God with us, God by our side, God close at hand.

And let's be clear, if there be any doubt, that this name identifies Jesus as God Himself. Not simply an emissary or representative or ambassador.

God Himself in our midst. This is no dream or fantasy or work of science fiction. This is a new reality. reality. And the name Emmanuel, it declares, describes this new reality that we find ourselves in, God with us.

But fifthly and finally, we want to just comment that the name Emmanuel also constitutes a promise. It constitutes a promise. And why do we say that?

Well, as we remember, as we have been doing, I imagine, the Christmas story of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. And as we consider the life He lived and the death He died, we could perhaps come with a legitimate concern.

[21 : 54] We could maybe respond in this way. We could say, well, yes, 2,000 years ago, God dwelt among us. 2,000 years ago, this planet Earth experienced a new reality, a recovered reality of God with us.

God walking the Galilean ways, God eating with the disciples in the person of Jesus, God healing the multitudes. But what about now? Did not Jesus return home to heaven?

Did He not leave His disciples? Did He not ascend once again to where He had come from? Are we not back to where we were with a distant God?

That was precisely the fear of the disciples. This was their great fear when Jesus said that He would be leaving them. And what did Jesus say to them?

Well, He gave them a promise. As we come and as we look at the close of Matthew's gospel, the gospel of Matthew begins with this presentation of Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us.

[23 : 03] And the gospel ends by Jesus promising His disciples that He will remain with them. Matthew chapter 28 verses 18 to the end, very familiar words.

Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. The gospel begins with Emmanuel, God with us, and the gospel ends with this promise of Emmanuel, God with us.

I will be with you, says Jesus to His disciples to the very end of the age. Now in fairness, a legitimate question could be, well, how is that?

That's the promise that He gives, but then He goes and ascends up into heaven. How is He with us? Well, we can turn to John's gospel in chapter 16 and verses 5 to 7 to answer the question, how is it that Jesus can be with us if He has ascended into heaven?

[24 : 13] And what do we read there in John 16 from verse 5? And Jesus Himself is speaking, Now I am going to Him who sent me. Yet none of you ask me, where are you going?

Because I have said these things you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the counselor, the Holy Spirit, will not come to you.

But if I go, I will send Him to you. Jesus promises to send the counselor, the Holy Spirit, as He is described in another part of the scriptures, the Spirit of Jesus.

Jesus Himself in the person of the Spirit is with us. And so this new reality of Emmanuel, God with us, continues today for God's people.

So this name of the child to be born, who will be called Emmanuel, which means God with us, this name presupposes, identifies a problem.

[25 : 19] It declares God's intention of solving that problem, of reconciling men and women to Himself. It identifies the one by whom this reconciliation would be achieved.

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who died on Calvary's tree in our place to solve the problem of sin. The name describes a new reality, and it constitutes a promise that this principle of Emmanuel holds true today for us as God's people.

But we close by asking a final question, and it is this. Is Emmanuel the reality of all? And the answer to that has to be no.

God has come near, and God continues to reach out His hand of friendship. The way of reconciliation has been and continues open for all.

But we have to grasp that hand. We have to walk that way. And if we fail to grasp that hand, if we fail to walk that way that has been opened up for us, then we remain far from God, without God and without hope.

[26 : 35] We remain those for whom it can be said God is not with us. And how are we to grasp that hand? How are we to walk that way that has been opened up?

By the path of repentance and faith. God is not with you. We are to walk that we are to walk that we are sinners and that we have rebelled against God and that our life is in many ways a permanent act of rebellion against Him.

And as recognizing our problem and condition, we turn to the one who has been provided. As we turn and put our trust in Jesus and seek the forgiveness of sins that only He can grant us.

And as we would trust in Him as our Lord and Savior, so we can experience and discover this reality of Emmanuel, God with us, God for us.

And those of us who by grace have been enabled to grasp that hand and who have experienced that reconciliation by faith in Jesus, we now have been given, you have been given that ministry of reconciliation.

[27 : 49] That you would be, that we would be the extended hand of Jesus, inviting those who as yet have not experienced Emmanuel, God with us.

As we close one year and as we look to the start of a new year, may it be our desire and may it be our set and fixed purpose, that we would be that extended hand of Jesus, that we would indeed take upon ourselves and fulfill this honorable ministry that we have been given, a ministry of reconciliation, that others who today are without hope and without God would experience Emmanuel, God with us.

Let us pray.