

Emmanuel

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TAKING CHRIST'S LOVE TO THE WORLD

“HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED IMMANUEL” (ISA.7:14)

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel”

Isaiah’s prophecy transcends its immediate application to the nation of Judah finding its ultimate fulfilment in the context of Christ’s birth. Judah is threatened by a coalition of Israel and Syria. Judah is ruled by a weak king who is defiant against the entreaties of Isaiah to prove God in the face of immanent war. God has actually said that he will rout the enemy but Ahaz is adamant that he will not step out on the word of God. Thus the promise of a miraculous birth of a son by a virgin daughter of Israel as a sign from the Lord of deliverance in the face of rebellious unbelief is incredulous. The prophecy is spoken despite his unbelief. The first prophecy contains the name Immanuel, but the liturgy of Old Testament scriptures that have been applied to the Christmas nativity include not only the prophecy of Ch.7 but also the prophecy of Ch.9. Both refer to a “Child” (7:16; 9:6 cf. Acts 4:27, 30) and both refer to a “Son” (7:14; 9:6). Putting the two prophecies alongside each other we find a cluster of titles that refer to Christ in His various offices as Messiah,

*“For to us a Child is born,
to us a Son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this” (Isa.9:6-7).*

These titles are Immanuel, Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. When these are expounded in the context of Christ’s life they reveal a rich tapestry of His attributes and offices. Jesus is like a prism that displays the Father’s essence. The prism breaks up a single beam of light by refraction into

its constituent spectral colours (the colours of the rainbow). The colours are His shining attributes which are lived out and expounded in the life and ministry of Jesus and He is the single beam of light from Father that speaks of pure deity – *“God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all”* (1Jn.1:5; Jn.3:19-21). The centre point of the prism from which the light suddenly spreads out in its rainbow of colours is the incarnation. The life of the Christ Child emerging into manhood and ministry is the exposition of those pure spectral colours of the rainbow. Jesus said to Philip, *“He who has seen Me has seen the Father”* (Jn.14:9). The person who knows Jesus has seen in Him the image of God, he has seen what God is like on the inside.

The only other reference to Immanuel in the Old Testament is also in Isaiah,

“Behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.” (Isa.8:7-8).

The Northern Kingdom of Israel faces invasion by Assyria which is the context of this second reference to Immanuel, and the name refers to the land of Israel. Whatever may have been the original meaning of Isaiah the use of the prophecy when applied in the context of the nativity is obviously the meaning that is adopted by the readers of the New Testament. The angel tells Joseph to name the baby Emmanuel which means **“God with us.”** It is “the angel of the Lord” who takes Isaiah’s prophecy and applies it to virgin Mary’s son, who is also to be named Jesus,

“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” (Mat.1:22-23).

The prophetic name is bestowed on Jesus by Joseph in anticipation of its fulfilment in His life. We will talk more about this coming of God among His people Israel as we proceed. His comings in the Old Testament were brief. When He visited men

and women He used the form of a man or that of an angel. At other times He was represented by images, symbols and dreams to which men could relate and understand. Mostly He spoke to men and women through speech in their own tongue/language. These theophanies were accompanied by the divine presence. Men like Moses knew God intimately (Nu.12:6-8) and conversed with God by means of language and they talked to God as they talked to their fellow men and women. You will remember how Jacob was visited by God in a dream but through ignorance of God's presence he exclaimed, *"Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not"* (Gen.28:16).

The presence of God in the Old Testament points directly to the messianic title "Emmanuel" which anticipates the coming of the person of Christ among His people through the incarnation.

Moses had completed his second forty days on the mountain of Sinai with God where he was immersed in His presence and was sustained there by Him. He was engaged in conversation with God about His continuing presence among the children of Israel. Moses says,

*"If your **presence** will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"* (Ex.33:15 cf. Josh.5:13-15; Isa.37:36).

The LORD promised Moses, *"My **presence** will go with you"* (Ex.33:14). Remember the name that is the centre of our focus "GOD WITH US." Moses of any man in the Old Testament lived in the holy presence of the LORD, but he knew that the Lord must also be at the centre of the children of Israel. The presence is simply a way of talking about God being there. Francis Schaeffer entitled one of his books "The God who is there." The Bible talks about the God who is here. There can be no presence without a Person. Another word for presence is glory. The psalmist David describes the LORD as the "God of glory" (Ps.29:3), Stephen also used this title associated with the call of God to Abraham (Acts 7:2) and Paul spoke of the "Father of glory" (Eph.1:17). The glory is the fragrance of His presence; it is the odour of God. Mary broke the alabaster cylinder of nard because she was in the presence of her

beloved Lord. The Bible tells us that the fragrance of the ointment filled the house, but more importantly Mary had anointed the Person of Christ. The anointing of Christ was her intent and purpose, the fragrance accompanied the anointing.

The cloud and the fire were tangible symbols of the presence of Jehovah/Yahweh in the camp of Israel, but where was He? The Chronicler describes Him as between the cherubim, seated above the ark (1Chron.13:6) which was in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle. He was there 24/7 and that is why the priests ministered to him by night and by day. Ezekiel described the Lord's final departure from the temple, *"And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city"* (Ezek.11:23). The rebuilt temple of Nehemiah lacked the divine presence, the "shekinah" glory. This vacuum was due to the absence of the Saviour, whose coming to earth was heralded by the angel hosts and the sudden manifestation of the glory of the Lord. The angels sang "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men" (Lk.2.9, 14). The sudden appearance of the glory of God and the angelic choir heralded the coming of the Christ child.

When God is present lives are touched and ***the activities of God accompany His presence***. Moses knew that God's presence meant that God's angel would fight for them and they would enjoy God's protection. We read in Isaiah, *"the angel of His presence saved them"* (Isa.63:9). If only Israel had treasured that holy presence and lived their lives in the light of that presence, but they grieved God's Holy Spirit and He quietly withdrew Himself from their midst. When Adam sinned the former presence of God that accompanied him in the garden was balm to his soul, but following his sin it was a "troubling presence" (Job 23:15; Ps.139:7) which resulted in conviction of sin and distress. In times of revival the presence of God is so intense that people cry out in conviction of sin, *"What must I do to be saved?"* (Acts 2:37) Revival is defined by Peter as, *"times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19).

When Jesus came the fleeting presence was exchanged for the permanent presence of the incarnate Christ. This had been anticipated by the abiding presence of God in the tabernacle, and John uses this same word when he spoke about Jesus coming in

the incarnation to live among men and women, *“And the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us”* (Jn.1:14).

The title “Emmanuel” is fulfilled in the incarnate Jesus. “God with us” becomes a reality in the Person of the Lord Jesus; wherever He is present His presence is felt. The presence of Jesus among His people was the fulfilment of this prophetic name. For the first time for God and for us God is with us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The significance of that is beyond our comprehension. For three and a half years men and women had access to Jesus. This was not the presence of God this was none other than God with us in a living human man who may also be described as God in the flesh. This is revolutionary for God and for humankind. Things will never be the same again for God and for man. God taking on human flesh was “not just for Christmas” but was forever. Today Christ is seated at the right hand of Father, *“this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:11) possessing a glorified body which He received when He rose from the dead. The angel said that Jesus will return again as He had left earth, so He will return with a glorified body which is the body which He now possesses. He will be the incarnate and glorified Christ forever. We His children will enjoy Him forever our Emmanuel.

As I have said you must not separate God from His presence or glory. You may recall the story of Peter Pan when he lost his shadow and tried to reunite himself with it. Wendy came to his aid by sewing it back onto him. Wherever you encounter the glory of God be sure that is the token of the invisible God present in that place. If we look at the Lord Jesus we see the same thing. We read that the power of the Lord was *present* to heal. When he was present things happened, devils were compelled to confess His deity, “You are the Son of God.” His presence moved people to acts of devotion, others to deep repentance and restitution. Others rejected the loving command to follow Him and thus deprived themselves of His divine presence in their lives. The alternative to the light of His presence is darkness which is inhabited by the presence of the evil one and demons.

Jesus’ teaching about the Holy Spirit brings this whole issue to a climax. While Jesus was on earth he inhabited a human body and thus was not omnipresent as He had been before the incarnation. Only a spirit has the attribute of omnipresence, and this is important for Jesus’ teaching in John Ch.14-16. Jesus begins his discourse on

the Holy Spirit by saying, “*I will ask the **Father** and **he** will give you another **“Comforter”** that **he** may abide with you forever*” (14:16)

- I want you to note the references to God and the pronouns that refer to Him and you will see this verse is strongly trinitarian. In close conjunction together these names and pronouns can only be understood as referring to each member of the trinity being on an equal footing. In the previous verses Jesus has given the clearest teaching on His relation to Father, “*He who has seen me has seen the Father*” (14:9), so now he affirms the equality of the *Paraclete/Advocate/Counsellor* with Himself and Father.

- I want you to notice the word “another” (*allos*), which means another of equal worth or status. Jesus promises the disciples that His replacement will be of the same kind as himself. In other words His equal status can only refer to His divinity. To replace God with God, to replace Jesus with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is thus affirming the deity of the Holy Spirit. We often fail to apply to the Spirit the same attributes of God that we apply to Jesus. The Spirit is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is all that God is. All those attributes are in His anointing as Jesus demonstrated in His ministry.

- He is entitled “The Spirit of Truth” (v17) Jesus also said of himself “I am the truth” (14:6). He is the Spirit of truth to those He indwells. Jesus says that “*He (the Holy Spirit) dwells **with** you,*” His presence is *with* them, but more importantly, says Jesus, “*He (the Holy Spirit) will dwell **in** you.*” The verse Jesus is speaking of a future time when the presence of God will not only be with them, but God will indwell them in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had been with them in Person for over three and a half years but He had not been *in* them. Jesus is promising a new dispensation of God, a second covenant which is superior to the old covenant. This covenant is inward and the former was outward. The tabernacle bore witness to the presence. Jesus embodied in Himself the Person of God. Similarly the Holy Spirit embodies the Person of God, but He will not accompany the disciples, like Jesus, but He will INDWELL them. This was such an important advance in man’s experience of God which became possible only through the accomplished work of salvation and the descent of the Holy Spirit. Jesus made it possible for us through

regeneration of heart to receive the Comforter. The Holy Spirit can only indwell that which is consistent with His own nature which is why we have to be born again by the Holy Spirit so that we can receive Him as our advocate and Lord. A verse in Ezekiel describes this perfectly, *"A new heart also I will give to you, and a new spirit I will put within you: I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. **And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes**"* (Ezek.36:26-27).

Jesus promises to return to be their comforter in the person of the Holy Spirit (Jn.14:18). He promised His omnipresence among us when we meet together as the family of God (Mat.18:20) and with those engaged in mission (Mat.28:20). This verse demonstrates a point I made earlier about the presence of God that accompanies His Person. Jesus says *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

- Jn.14:20 refers to trinitarian fellowship. Jesus prayed this matter through in His High-priestly prayer of John Ch.17. Salvation is not an end in itself but is the means whereby God lifts us up and brings into fellowship with the Father and the Son by mutual indwelling. Jesus first defines this in verse twenty and repeats it more fully in Ch.17. The Holy Spirit makes fellowship with God possible. When He indwells the believer fellowship with a trinitarian God becomes a wonderful realization. Paul describes the fullness of God that was dwelling in Christ as now indwelling the children of God (Col.2:9-10).

- In the light of our previous comments one begins to appreciate the importance of the Spirit's coming. Perhaps Jesus' statement in this verse can now be better understood. In 16:7 He says, *"It is **necessary** for you that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you, but if I depart I will send Him to you."* The procedure of Jesus' departure/ascension, followed by His exaltation to Father's right hand and the gift of the promised Holy Spirit for His disciples is described by Jesus, *"But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceeds from the Father He will testify of me"* (15:26). This procedure is clearly presented to us by Peter in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:33). Note the trinitarian structure of Jn.15:26. Not only do we have the procedure outlined for us but Jesus teaches about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relationship to Himself, *"He will glorify me."* This explains in some measure the

strange neglect on the part of the Western church of the Holy Spirit who has emptied Himself (kenosis) as Jesus also emptied himself for us (Phil.2:8). The Holy Spirit has made His primary ministry to focus our attention continually on Christ and away from Himself. He has accomplished this distraction to His own neglect. As we have recognized the humility of Christ in His self-emptying even to the death of the cross, so we must likewise honour the Spirit in His self-emptying to exalt the glorified Messiah. Humility is an attribute of the Godhead.

The title Emmanuel is fulfilled in the Person of the Lord Jesus which became possible through the incarnation and God becoming “the man Christ Jesus.” This title has a further fulfilment in the coming of the Holy Spirit. God is now not only present in the Person of Christ but He is now indwelling the Christian which was not possible before Pentecost. Jesus was with the disciples during His three and a half years of ministry but now the Holy Spirit indwells the disciples permanently and forever and so wherever we go the presence of God is there.

An expository message preached in the chapel of Allahabad Bible Seminary on December 12th 2011. Derrick Harrison

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

Hark the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful, all ye nations rise
Join the triumph of the skies
With the angelic host proclaim:
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Christ by highest heav'n adored
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come
Offspring of a Virgin's womb
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell

Jesus, our EMMANUEL

Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings
Ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Charles Wesley (1739)

