

Sermon - Great Expectations – Emmanuel

Pastor Ed Blonski | December 18, 2022

Immanuel Expectations

In 1987, Chip Davis of Mannheim Steamroller fame, started putting together a follow-up recording of Christmas music to his blockbuster cd A Fresh Aire Christmas.

Included in the set list was O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Always wanting to find new and innovative ways of presenting music, he felt that this Christmas carol was well-suited to be translated into Latin and wanted to record it as a neo-Gregorian chant.

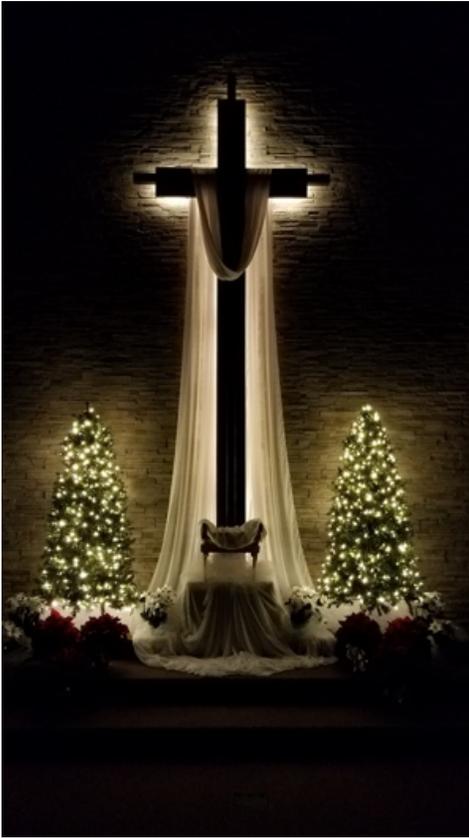
He contacted his friend John Rutter, director of the Cambridge Singers to translate it into Latin and then possibly record it for him.

John Rutter had to gently admonish his friend in telling him that the song was *already* translated as it was *originally* a Gregorian Latin chant from the 9th Century!

O Come, O Come Emmanuel has been part of the Christmas celebration of Christians for 1200 years!



The Song – a part of Advent and Christmas



For many people – myself included – it is an essential part of Christmas. Based on the seven “O Antiphons” that are chanted as part of the Office of Vespers during the seven days before Christmas, O Come, O Come Emmanuel prepares the church to celebrate the incredible Good News of redemption and salvation brought by the birth of Jesus Christ.

The Prayer of God’s People in Exile

And while it traces its origins to the 9th Century AD, the theme of the hymn goes back even further – to the 4th and 5th Century BC when the people of God were suffering in their Babylonian Exile.

This song is a prayerful cry of God’s people in exile for redemption and salvation.

Repeated is the refrain “Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel. Shall come to thee, O Israel.”

The Word’s Connection to Christmas

Emmanuel. That is a very “Christmas” word, isn’t it? It shows up in two Christmas Eve day readings.

The Old Testament and Gospel Reading for Christmas Eve Day (but not for Christmas Eve Midnight) are from Isaiah 7 and Matthew 1.

a. Isaiah 7

Isaiah 7 is the original “Emmanuel” prophecy that reveals one of the more well-known titles of the Messiah as well as the Virgin Birth of the Messiah.

b. Matthew 1

And Matthew 1 is the first Christmas Gospel where Matthew reveals Joseph’s side of the Nativity story.

When Matthew heard that Mary was pregnant and knew *he* wasn’t the father, he made plans to divorce Mary and move on with his life somehow.



An angel of the Lord – many people think it was Gabriel again who had already spoken to Zechariah and Mary herself – talked Joseph out of it.

He told Joseph the true identity of the child Mary was carrying and instructed him to name him “Jesus.” He even explained to Joseph why this child was to be named “Jesus.”

“*Because he will save his people from their sins.*” Jesus means, “The LORD saves” or “The LORD is the Savior.”

Then the angel quotes Isaiah 7 to confirm the connection of Jesus to God.

Jesus wasn’t just the latest edition of the anointed ones – as so many prophets, priests and kings were anointed before him.

Jesus was literally *Emmanuel* – God With Us.

Immanuel and Your Christmas

Emmanuel is the most Christmas-y of names because Christmas is first-and-foremost about the Incarnation of God!

“Incarnation” is the big church word that means “put on flesh” or “become human.”

Emmanuel gives us the name to what happened at the first Christmas 2026 years ago!

God became man to dwell among us.

Jesus was literally *God with us!*

Signs are given with expectations in mind

The virgin birth was a sign given by God. And like so many of the signs given in Scripture, there was two fulfillments of this particular sign of a virgin given birth to a child.

700 years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah gives King Ahaz – the current anointed one of Israel – a sign from God.

And with this sign came certain expectations.

Ahaz was about to partner with Assyria to protect himself from attack and invasion from Syria and its allies.

God sent Isaiah to Ahaz to tell him to trust in Him, not in human allies, and to ask for a sign to confirm that his trust in God is well-founded.



Ahaz, in false piety, refuses to ask for the sign. I guess he had already made up his mind or at least thought he knew better how to rule his kingdom through foreign policy.

God gives him the sign anyway – that a virgin will give birth to a son that will be named Immanuel.

This was to show Ahaz that God was willing to be with him, to bless and protect him as He had promised so many centuries earlier to his ancestor Abraham!

The Lord gives a sign

When the Lord gives a sign, you can be sure that He's not messing around. The sign will be powerful, it will be obvious, and it can be trusted.

Expectation is that He will follow through on it

When God gives a sign, the expectation should always be that He will follow through on it.

It happened first with Ahaz. One of my seminary teachers once told me that after Assyria had defeated the Northern Kingdom of Israel, exiled and scattered them all over the Mediterranean world, and had subjected Ahaz and the Southern Kingdom of Judah – just as God had warned would happen – there was this little kid named Emmanuel running around to constantly remind Ahaz how badly he messed up to not trust in God.

The Immanuel Expectations



The Emmanuel sign not only came true in Ahaz's time, but as we know from Matthew's Gospel, its ultimate fulfillment was in the birth of Jesus Christ.

Christmas was the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God with us.

Christmas is all about the Emmanuel Expectations – of which I have three.

The sign comes from God

The sign comes from God. And when it comes from God we can trust that not only will it come true, it will be for our good if we receive it through faith!

The birth will be a miracle that only God could do

The expectation is also that it will be a miracle. The Emanuel prophecy could only be fulfilled by God.

A virgin give birth? We know how normal pregnancies happen. But a virgin birth? Only God could do something like that!

Interestingly enough, God seems to be in the business of miracle babies.

- Sarah & Isaac
- Rebekah & the twins Jacob and Esau
- Rachel and Joseph
- Manoah and Samson
- Hannah and Samuel
- Elizabeth and John the Baptist.
- And Mary and Jesus.

The name means something

This name, Emmanuel, is significant. As nearly every name in the Bible means something, so does this one. And you know what it is.

It means "God with us."

But it is more than just a name. Jesus' name of Emmanuel is *exactly who Jesus is*.

Just as the name "Jesus" means "*Yahweh - or the LORD - Saves*" so "Emmanuel" is exactly and literally who Jesus is.

God with us.

John begins his Gospel expanding theologically on this. It is the third telling of Christmas in the Gospels and the one normally used on Christmas Day.

Ironically, John doesn't mention the name "Jesus" until the 17th verse – opting instead to expound on the Son of God being the Word and the Light.

All expansions on the sign of Emmanuel – how Jesus is God with us.

The One who is the Creator of all things is with us.

The One who is the Light of God's truth is with us.

The One who brings the glory of God to us is with us.

All of these are integral parts of the signs of God, the signs that bring expectations along with them.

So, the three Emmanuel Expectations are: 1) the sign comes from God; 2) the birth will be a miracle; and 3) the name means something.

The reason God gives signs

Expectations are the reason God gives signs. He wants you to have certain expectations, so He gives you signs.



Because He loves you!

He gives you signs because He loves you. You have signs of God's love. Emmanuel. The Word. The Light. All signs that have certain expectations attached to them.

He promised to

God also gives signs because He promised He would. And God promises to give you signs because He knew that would help tremendously to see Him.

Remember what the angel said to the shepherds on Christmas? *"And this shall be a sign unto you..."*?

He keeps His promises

And when the signs are fulfilled, you have that extra-added benefit in knowing that God keeps His promises.

The Emmanuel Sign was a continuation of the expectation God's people have had since God first promised a Savior in the Garden of Eden.

The fulfilling sign was the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

And that baby was God with us!

The Signs are still here

The signs didn't end when Jesus ascended. We still have plenty of signs today.

Water joined to God's Word is a sign. A sign of faith created and sins forgiven in Holy Baptism.

Bread and wine joined to God's Word is a sign. A sign of sins forgiven through the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Immanuel Expectations

Immanuel and Your Christmas

In fact, every time you come to the Lord's Table, it is Christmas! The Emmanuel Expectations are here every time we partake of Holy Communion.

For when you receive the bread and the wine, you are receiving the body and blood of Jesus.

You are receiving – for the forgiveness of your sins, life and salvation – Jesus, God with us!

Emmanuel is the most Christmas-y of names because Christmas is first-and-foremost about the Incarnation of God!

God became man to dwell among us.

Jesus was – and is - literally *God with us!*