

Topic	And You Shall Call his name Emmanuel
Reference	Matthew 1
Date	20 December 2020
Speaker	Yee Dian Lee

Once again, it is my joy and privilege to be standing here, sharing with you from the Word of God. Last month I celebrated my 61st birthday. Maybe I shouldn't use the word celebrated, I observed my 61st birthday. In my six decades of existence I have never experienced such a subdued and quiet Christmas season as the pandemic is still raging out there. Nevertheless, I trust that all the same, that God will pour on us the spirit of Christmas and grant us the deeper sense of the reason for a season. It is customary for us in the month of December to have a series of sermons connected to the birth of Jesus, and this morning the sermon topic is, "And You Shall Call his name Emmanuel".

Although the text read to us is from Matthew 1 verses 18 to 25, I shall not dissect or unpack this block of verses as I normally do. Instead, we shall focus our attention mostly on just one verse, verse 23, where we find the name Emmanuel. Matthew quoted this verse from Isaiah 7 verse 14.

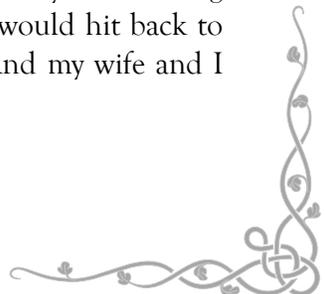
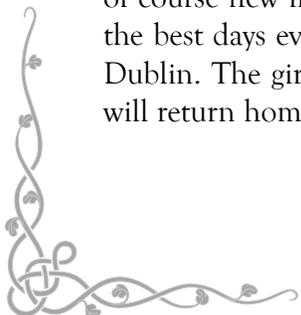
So, this sermon will revolve around this important word, "Emmanuel".

- How shall we understand it?
- What does it mean for us in the journey of our life and in the conduct of our faith?

Emmanuel means God with us and hence we shall examine broadly this impossible concept of God being with us. God is the almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth whom the Israelites referred to as the Most High, how can he be with us? We shall search the scripture from Genesis to Revelation to try to understand this, but shall we first commit this time to the Lord in prayer...

Our father in heaven, amidst the trying times we live in, Christmas this year seems different. Yet we pray it will be different, not because of external circumstances, but because we are refreshed by you in increasing measure as the spirit continues to minister to us, the significance of the birth of your son, our Lord Jesus. He was born because you long so much to be with your people, your children. Help us understand what this truly means for this we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

Our son Jeremy left for Ireland to pursue his further studies in August 2016. Our daughter Melody left for England a year later in August 2017 to do the same. When the boy left, he went alone, but when the girl left my wife and I actually flew with her to London. Somehow the girl gets preferential treatment. Don't ask me why. My wife and I reckon that at a time that it wouldn't be so easy for us to be together as a family from that point on, and so after we arrived at London, the four of us went on a holiday in Europe. Jeremy of course flew in from Dublin to join us. After spending two wonderful weeks together, they were among the best days ever in my life. We were back in London again. And from there, the boy would hit back to Dublin. The girl will make her way to Exeter to enroll herself in the university there. And my wife and I will return home to our emptiness.



And this is what it was like, our last lunch together in London. I still remember this day vividly. It was the 14th of August three years ago. And later that day we said goodbye we say our goodbyes at this South Kensington station where my wife and I will be taking the Piccadilly line going East to Heathrow airport. It was a long and sad and painful goodbye at the station, as we hugged and kissed our kids and wish them well.

It is indeed sad to be separated from the ones you love. It is so nice to be together with those who are precious to you, to be close and near to them physically. For about two decades, the kids had always been with us all the time and so it really wasn't easy for us that they were going to be apart from us, separated from us by vast distances. Only God knows when the day will come when the four of us can be together again, like we used to before they left. And those of you who have children living with you, do you realize how lucky and how blessed you are?

I guess you can sense what I'm driving at as I relate all this to you. Just as we want so badly to be with our kids, God loves his children so much that he longs to be with them. He doesn't like the idea of being separated from them and with this in mind, we now look deeper into the word, Emmanuel or God with us.

I shall start by offering you some peripheral knowledge surrounding the name 'Emmanuel'. Sometimes it is spelled with an 'I', sometimes with an 'E'. Depending on whether you are translating from Greek or Hebrew, even it's translated from Hebrew it will be spelt with an 'I', if from Greek then it is an 'E' and since Matthew was originally written in Greek, the word Emmanuel in verse 22 of our texts is often spelt with an E as in the title of today's sermon.

Now, as I mentioned at the beginning, this verse is a direct quote from Isaiah 7 verse 14. If you check that verse, all English translations, spell it with an 'I'. Since Isaiah was originally written in Hebrew. Now, whether it's with an E or I, I also mention at the beginning that the name Emmanuel means God with us. The suffix 'EL' at the end is the Hebrew generic word that means God from the word Elohim, whereas Emanu simply means with us. Now technically the practice of embedding the name of God within a person's name is known as Theophory and hence Emmanuel is referred to as the theophoric name because it has this EL at the end.

Now I wish to point out that there are in fact many names in the Bible that similarly carry the name of God in it. Christian parents are fond of taking Hebrew names from the Bible when naming their babies, but you may not be aware that a certain name may be carrying the name of God. For example,

Ariel means lion of God,
 Daniel - Judged by God,
 Ezekiel - God will strengthen,
 Gabriel - Strong man of God.
 And then the popular
 Michael which means who is like God,
 Raphael - God has heal.
 Samuel which means God has heard.

If your name is one of these names listed here, you better behave yourself. You better not be naughty for your carry the name of God in your name. Even if your name Danny or Mickey or Sammy, they are all originally theophoric names, including also Michelle, which is the feminine form of Michael. This is what I call the L series names ending with EL.

Now in the Hebrew Bible, God is also referred to as Yahweh or Jehovah in English. And because of this, there is another series of theophoric names known as the YAH series from the YAH in Yahweh and these are names ending with AH. For example,

Isaiah - salvation of God,
 Jeremiah, God exalts,
 Nehemiah, God comforts,
 Obadiah, God's servant.

And so on. And so my son's named Jeremy is the theophoric name, since it is a short form of Jeremiah. Now if these type of names frightens you, maybe you should just play safe and name your baby, maybe Porche or Banquet or something like that.

Now, coming back to our topic, what happens is that about 740 years before Jesus was born the prophet Isaiah prophesied that he was to be given the name Emmanuel, and this prophecy was made during the reign of this King Ahaz, who was the King of Judah at that time. And prophet Isaiah gave that prophecy to this King Ahaz and this is what Matthew wrote in verses 22 and 23 of our texts and I quote from the King James version.

Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet (the prophet here refers to Isaiah) saying Behold, a Virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which, which being interpreted is God with us.

Now let's see what Isaiah prophesied 740 years before. Isaiah 7 verse 14 again from the King James version.

Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; (now you hear refers to this King Ahaz); Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

So you see Matthew was quoting Isaiah, almost word for word, but why later when he was born was this baby in the manger given another name, which is Jesus. How did the name Jesus come about? Now in this account of the birth of Jesus Matthew wrote in our texts of how the angel Lord appeared to Joseph and Joseph was told to give the baby the name, Jesus. This is what the angel said to Joseph in verse 21 of our texts.

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.

And so we see in our texts, the Mary's child was to be given two names. Firstly, the name Jesus as instructed by the angel and secondly, Emmanuel as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah 740 years earlier. But why not just stick with one name, Emmanuel? Does it mean that Jesus had two names? Now one way of understanding this is that Emmanuel is a sort of a functional name. It speaks of God's plan to dwell with his people. Whereas Jesus is more for personal name, a name which we use to address him personally.

That's why, when we pray, we say in Jesus' name, not many people say in Emmanuel's name, which is not wrong of course. Not to be sure Mary wouldn't have called her son Emmanuel, she would have used his personal name. Also certainly she didn't call him Jesus because Jesus is the English version of his actual name. Mary would have called her Yeshua, which is in Aramaic language, very close to Hebrew and which they use at a time. During this time Jesus full name would likely be Yeshua Ben Yousef or Jesus son of Joseph. The word 'ben' is like the word 'bin' that we find in the names of our Malay friends. And you may like to know that Yeshua is the short form of the Hebrew name 'Yehoshua'.

Yehoshua by the way is the successor of Moses. In other words, Yehoshua is none other than Joshua in English. Now how Yeshua became Jesus, how Yehoshua became Joshua is a long story. In any case, all these four names are in essence the same. And notice that Yehoshua is also a theophoric name. Now remember the YAH series. It means God saves as David Adams pointed out last Sunday. Now since Yeshua is a short form of Yehoshua, it also means God saves and that's why the angel said you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. The angel was merely stating the meaning behind the name, Yeshua, which come from the name Yehoshua.

And so we see that Jesus was given two names when he was born; two theophoric names. Now do these two names, Jesus and Emmanuel relate to each other. Now we shall see, how they are both so intertwined and connected to each other as we get on with the rest of the sermon. We shall also examine how God saves, which is the meaning behind the name Jesus, is tightly linked to the idea of God with us, which is what the name Emmanuel means.

Moving on to our main discussion, you should know that the name Emmanuel appears only three times in the Bible. The first time in Isaiah 7 verse 14, as I've pointed out. The third time in the Matthew 1 verse 23 in our texts and the second time it appears in the Bible is in Isaiah 8 verse 8. Now, since it is only mentioned twice in the Old Testament, it appears that the idea of God with us or God in our midst is not something prevalent in ancient biblical times. Is that the case? Was God with or was God not with his people before Jesus was born? The answer is not so simple.

Well, if Jesus was to be given the name Emmanuel or God with us upon his birth, it does suggest that prior to his birth that God was not with his people. Because if God had been with these people all along then the name Emmanuel wouldn't make much sense. And so the implication is that prior to the birth of Jesus, God was not with his people. He was not dwelling among them and that the birth of Jesus changed all that. The name Emmanuel would attest to God changing the way he was interacting with his people. He was not there in their midst and now in the person of Jesus He was right before their eyes.

Now indeed the idea of God being with his people is unique to Christianity. For example, there is this other major religion of the world where God is often portrayed as someone far away, someone rather

unapproachable, someone to whom there is no easy access, God is like social distancing from us. He keeps us distanced because he is God and we are not, and for this reason in the minds of non-Christians the message of Christmas, the idea of God being together with mankind is rather incredulous. Something very hard for them to accept. What do you mean God in our midst together with us, that's nonsensical. That's not in God's nature. But as I described during the introduction to the sermon, when I talk about how we want so much to be together with our kids, I say that God loves his children so much that he longs to be with them. He doesn't like to be separated from them. Now this is very central in the teachings of the Bible. It is also the very core of the Christian faith.

Now, this is so important that I'm going to zoom in on this. Now although the word Emmanuel only appears three times in the Bible. If we scan the pages of scripture, we find it that idea of God with us, God longing to be with these people, it actually stretches from cover to cover of the Bible. How so? Now, although I mentioned that a while ago that the birth of Jesus mark the beginning of a time of God with us, the whole matter is actually not so simple. It is more than just God not with us before the birth of Jesus and then God with us after the birth of Jesus. It is more complex than that.

I shall now present you the five phases of how God interacts with His people from Genesis to Revelation. Now, whenever I mentioned Us, I don't mean just Us, but God's people in general. Okay the five phases of God's interaction with these people.

1. GOD WITH US IN EDEN,
from Genesis chapters two and three.
2. GOD NEAR US IN SINAI,
as recorded in the Exodus and also stretching throughout most of Old Testament history
3. GOD WITH US IN GALILEE,
in a person of Jesus as documented in the four gospels. And this is what Christmas is all about.
4. GOD WITHIN US TODAY
that started from Acts chapter 2 and throughout church history.
5. GOD WITH US AGAIN FOR ETERNITY,
as described in Revelation 21.

Now, to help you digest this better, I've expanded this as a timeline chart, which I will run through this so that we can get a full picture of God with us. I shall start from the left in the Garden of Eden marked by the red double arrow, which is limited sort of a God with us. Limited because it was just Adam and Eve, but still God was with his children from the time he created Adam until the time Adam and his wife fell into sin. Now we are not sure how long this phase one lasted. There is a curious verse in Genesis 3 verse 8 that describes God walking in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day.

Many Bible scholars have speculated that God was present with Adam and Eve in some sort of a physical form because both of them could hear God approaching and both of them tried to hide from him. Now,

whether God took the form of this physical being or not it's not important, but what this verse does suggest is that God was in close fellowship with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. He was with them. Until it came to an abrupt end when they chose to disobey him and fellowship with God was broken and God and man became separated by sin.

Fast-forward to Exodus 25, we find the Israelites in the Sinai desert roughly about a year after they had left their bondage to slavery in Egypt, they would wander in the Sinai wilderness for the next 39 years and all this time God was cut off from his people because of sin. But I also imagine that God must have missed his people very much, although it might sound a little odd to put it that way and that's why he told Moses in Exodus 25 verse 8

Then have them make a sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them.

God wanted to be with his people and so he instructed Moses and the Israelites that a sanctuary be built and this sanctuary is also known as the tabernacle, which was the sort of a mobile temple in a ship of a rectangular tent and that's why in Exodus is often referred to as the tent of meeting. And this is a phase two in our chat. The glory of God would fill the tabernacle as a column of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The awesome physical presence of God will be manifested in that place, which was the setup just outside their camp. God was dwelling with his people again, but the trouble is not just anyone who could enter the tabernacle to meet God. With his sins he would die immediately in the presence of a Holy God. Only the priests were allowed to enter to be with God in his Holy presence. And that will be Aaron and his sons, but they needed to go through all kinds of consecration and purification rituals before they could step into the sanctuary. And this will go on throughout most of the Old Testament history. That's why the double red arrow is quite long here, including the many years after the tabernacle was replaced by a proper temple in Jerusalem.

God was not exactly so accessible. Although his physical presence was in a temple or in the tabernacle, we may say that God was near but not so near. God was far but not so far and that's why instead of God with us, I wrote here God near us. Now here, I must point out something important that as the period of the Old Testament came to a close God became silent for 400 years between Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament until Matthew, the first book of the New Testament. God didn't speak a word. He didn't appoint any prophets to speak on his behalf. Total silence for 400 years.

In the chart, I Mark this with a row of red X. Now we may call this period God not with us and in all likelihood, the presence of God was not in the temple and again this might sound a bit odd, but I think God must have been very fed up with His people. And why do I say that? Now as you see at the end of phase one, we see the presence of sin in Eden when Adam and Eve fell and through our phase two, we witnessed the power of sin taking whole as the people of God became more and more rebellious, more and more disobedient as they turn away from God. And this is the sad overall story of the Old Testament from Exodus to Malachi.

With this in mind, we come to the third phase of God with us but in the person of Jesus, which is the message of Christmas. The two earlier phases are a necessary backdrop to truly understand why Jesus was given the name Emmanuel God with us. God again was in close fellowship with his people through the

person of Jesus, but only this time he was going to do something drastic to deal with the unresolved issue of sin. I just explained a minute ago that the presence of sin in Eden gradually led to the power of sin overcoming the Israelites. And this will eventually lead to the penalty of sin, which is eternal condemnation. For the wages of sin is death from Roman 6:23.

Notice the sequence first the presence of sin and then the power of sin and then finally the penalty of sin. What God did is that with the birth of his son and his subsequent death on the cross, he first dealt with the penalty of sin with Jesus, which Jesus bore for us on our behalf on the cross. Then He deals with the power of sin, through the Holy Spirit in phase four. And finally the presence of sin will be totally eradicated in phase five. So now, do you see how the five phases are interconnected? How they weave together as one comprehensive plan by God from the beginning of time until the end of time and into eternity.

As I was saying with the birth of Jesus God was again with this, but the purpose of word becoming flesh, the purpose of Jesus taking the form of a man is very specific. The lowly manger in Bethlehem may be a popular symbol associated with Christmas but ultimately it is about the rugged cross in Calvary. This phase three is relatively short, only 33 years, including only three years of Jesus in his earthly ministry. He performed many miracles. He healed the sick. He taught about the kingdom of God. He did many things, but his focus was always on the cross. He was very single-minded about going to the cross on our behalf for our sake, so that we can be saved from our sins and that's the purpose, why he was born.

Hence on one hand, the name Emmanuel encapsulates the message of Christmas, which is God with us. But why did God need to be with us? The name Jesus encompasses the reason, as the angel explained to Joseph, he came to be with us to save us from our sins. Why did he need to do that? In order that God can be truly with us, so that sin will not come into the way anymore. So that the people of God can be finally reconciled to him, and this summarizes the link between the two names, Emmanuel and Jesus.

Now back to our chat one last time, I shall quickly go through the last two phases of God with us. Phase four started in Jerusalem about a week after Jesus ascended to heaven and it is recorded in Acts chapter 2. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended and fill the earth believers about 120 of them and since that day until today, the Holy Spirit would dwell in anyone who profess Jesus as Lord and savior. And that's why in this phase four is more than just God with us, it is really God within us. And we are now in the midst of a phase four in the timeline of God's plan. Now, remember in phase two God's presence used to dwell in the tabernacle in Sinai or in the temple in Jerusalem, now we all have become temples of God with his spirit dwelling within us, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:16 and also 6:19, there is no need for the physical temple anymore because the dwelling place of God is here.

As a matter of fact, the temple in Jerusalem was later destroyed in 70 AD. Now the purpose of the Holy spirit dwelling within us is to transform us, to sanctify us, to renew us. You may ask why is it necessary for the spirit of God to do this work in us? If you remember what I said is to help us overcome the power of sin. Our sins may have already been forgiven, because of the work of Christ on the cross, but sin cast a long shadow in our lives and its hold on us needs to be dismantled and that's the role of the spirit dwelling within us. And further in phase one, we saw Adam and Eve were given a choice, but they choose to disobey God and fell into sin.

Bad choices have consequences. Now the Holy Spirit is also known as the counselor. So through his counsel or guidance, he helps us make the right choices to obey God's command, to lead lives that are pleasing to him. The end result of this renewal process is that we will be ready for the last phase of God with us.

This last phase is in a future, in the near future I believe. It will stretch into eternity. This wondrous and blessed period of God with us, and this is described Revelation 21,

God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Now in some translations, it says he will tabernacle with them with a noun tabernacle is now used as a verb. And so in a way this is linked to Exodus 25 verse 8 when God said he wanted to dwell among his people, it will happen again and now in a more increment way unlike in Sinai, we will be in the physical presence of God enjoying close and sweet fellowship with him, just like it was in Eden and Galilee because there'll be no more sin, there will also be no more death, no mourning, no pain. This is the blessed hope that should bubble up in the soul of all believers as we look forward to the day when God will be with us physically again.

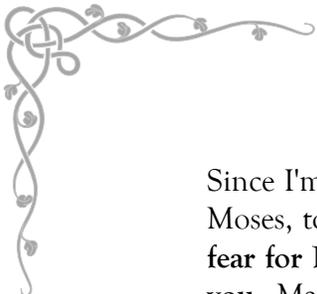
In the short time that we have, we have covered in depth the background and the significance of the name behind the name, Emmanuel. Now to conclude the sermon the question is this, how can the understanding of Emmanuel be practical and meaningful for us? What lessons from Emmanuel we can apply in our journey of life to impact the conduct of our faith?

I shall offer you two applications that can make a difference in our day to day living:

1. As Jesus was concluding his ministry on earth, he said in Matthew 28, **surely I'm with you always, always to the very end of the age.** What did he mean? I'm with you, I'm with you always when he was about to ascend to heaven. Of course, he was referring to the impending coming and ministry of the Holy Spirit so that God will be within us as we have discussed. And so the first lesson is this. Because God is always with us, better still God is within us, you never, ever have to feel lonely anymore. Loneliness can be a terrible feeling. Friends may forsake us, colleagues may avoid us, relatives may abandon us, husband and wife may leave us, children maybe far away as I described at the beginning, but always remember God is always with you, He is within you, and let me repeat the first lesson because God is always with us, better still God is within us you never, ever have to feel lonely anymore.

And just as he told Joshua in Joshua chapter 1, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you. **God is also saying to us, I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. God never abandons his people. No believer should ever feel lonely or abandoned.**

2. Emmanuel means God with us. If God is with us, God is also for us and time and again throughout the Old Testament God said to many individuals do not be afraid for I am with you.



Since I'm with you, you don't have to be afraid. And he said this to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses, to Joshua, to Gideon, to Daniel, et cetera. The word of God in Isaiah 41, verse 10, **do not fear for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for, I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you.** Many of us carry a lot of fears in the journey of life. We feel anxious about our job or business or children, our health, what is going to happen in the future, et cetera, especially during these trying times of a pandemic, which has brought about much fear. To set an example, you know, a couple of months ago in August Melody was tested positive for COVID-19. Were we worried? Of course we were worried. And the other day she told me that, she is scheduled to take the vaccine the next month in January. Is the vaccine safe? I hope so. Are we worried? Of course, we are worried, but God is saying to us, look I'm with you. Am I not? Why do you need to worry so much? Don't be afraid. And God again, told Joshua in Joshua chapter one, be strong and courageous, do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged for the Lord. Your God will be with you wherever you go. And this is what Emmanuel can mean to us just as no believers should ever feel lonely or abandoned. No believers should ever need to feel afraid or anxious because Almighty God is with us and for us.

And let me repeat the second lesson, **no believer ever needs to feel afraid or anxious because almighty God is with us and for us.**

They made these reflections surrounding the name Emmanuel instructors, as we observe Christmas soon. And as we transitioned into 2021.

Shall we close in prayer.

Father in heaven, how can our finite minds ever fathom the idea of God with us, that the one who set the stars in their causes above, the one who established the sun in its place would empty himself and take the form of a man. Your son, our Lord Jesus laid aside his majesty to dwell among us and became obedient to death on the cross so that we might live and be saved from our sins so that you and we, your children can be together. May this Christmas be an occasion for us to ponder this profound thoughts and what Emmanuel means to us. For we ask this in your son's name. Amen.