

SERMON NOTES

Immanuel - God is (with) us!

Matthew 1:22-23 | 24 Dec 2023 | Rev Dr Aaron Tay

What do you feel when you think about God? Is he the God of friendship, a nice and warm fuzzy feeling or is he the God who is your silent companion when you are feeling lonely or experience challenges? Is God just a nice warm feeling on the last week of the year, and after the holidays we are back to the doldrums of real life?

Immanuel, God with us

Anyone who believes in the Divine will believe that their God is great, for who will worship a God who is not great or powerful? But our Holy Scriptures recounts some points when the Creator God was not only not great, He was small. On Christmas Day, God became small, powerless and vulnerable. Jesus, who was born in a manger, was no ordinary person. He is the eternal Son of God, also divine, like God the Father. Yet He chose to come into the world as a baby. Why did He choose to be small and vulnerable, instead of coming in all His greatness and glory?

God needed to be incarnated as a human being so that we can believe that He understands us and He truly cares for us. In Jesus Christ, God went through all human struggles. However, often times we want not just empathy but also solutions. The good news is that God can provide us that blessing to help us overcome challenges of life, to receive love, peace, hope and joy.

Our Vision

To be disciples of Jesus Christ

Our Mission

We exist to make disciples who love God, love one another and love the lost



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He is the God who came near to be at our side as we struggle through difficulties, as well as helping us in a tangible ways. That's why one of the names of the baby in that manger in Bethlehem is Immanuel, God with us (Matt 1:22-23). Jesus is not just with us, He is us, He is one of us, He is like us.

God became a baby so that, if we allow Him to be near us, we can see Him, hear Him and feel Him. When that happens, we will be able to

- Receive His help in overcoming Problems (Rocky paths)
- Fulfil the Purpose of our lives (Reasons for living)
- Know our heavenly Papa personally (Relationship)

Problems

Problems in life is inevitable. They happened sometimes due to our own sinful choices or the effects of sin in the world. Most times we may be able to handle the little problems that crop up in our work or personal lives, but sometimes the problems can be so great that they threaten our dreams and relationships. God is near us to help us overcome difficulties and obstacles, if we allow Him to.

Remember Immanuel, God with us, God is us. Even as we encounter problems, Jesus also encountered problems even at the start of His earthly life. Knowing that Jesus has suffered gives us assurance that He understands us in our pain. Immanuel (God with us) tells us that He is with us to help us in our problems. Pray to Him, be with Him. God wants to help us fulfil our dreams and purposes, but we need to ask God.

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Purpose

God wants to be near to us, so that we are able to not only receive His help in overcoming problems but also to fulfil our purpose, our goals and dreams. God is concerned about our dreams and goals because we are important to Him, despite that fact that we are small and insignificant in relation to the universe. God sent Jesus to us so that we know we are important to Him (2 Thess 2:16-17; Zeph 3:17). That's why Jesus came to earth as a human being – He came personally to tell us that He loves us, we are significant because He loves us.

Sometimes in our pride, we may think why do we need God's help? We may desire to fulfil our own dreams with our own efforts. But we need guidance from God because sometimes what we dream about, what we desire, may not be the best for us. It can either be

- a) Sinful, that is, it may hurt us or hurt others. For example, dreaming about wealth accumulation for the pursuit of earthly pleasures, selfish ambition and human pride. But James 4:3 teaches that "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures". Or
- b) We are aiming too low - If we trust God and allow Him to, He will transform us from within, to help us from wrong motives, and to bless us in fulfilling the purposes of our lives.

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God says “I sent Jesus to you, so that you would trust that I have a great plan for your lives, and I am willing to give you the desires of your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:32, Psalms 37:3-5). When we trust and follow God, we might even discover that what we want is a shadow of what God has planned for us, meaning that we may be aiming too low for our dreams. Immanuel, God is with us - Jesus came to become like us so that we can become like Him (Romans 8:29). Let the Spirit of God guide us to the purposes of our lives.

Relationships

Our lives are defined by our relationships. The health of our lives is oftentimes dependent on the health of our relationships. In our fast-paced society, sometimes relationships become a commodity, taking the least priority in our daily pursuit of worldly success. This lack of genuine relationships breeds loneliness, resulting in unhealthy relationships for those seeking to alleviate loneliness. Yet, loneliness is never in the will of God. God Himself is a communal God of 3 persons – Father, son and Holy Spirit. Relationships are important to God. Jesus Himself came to restore the relationships between God and men, and between people. Our relationship with God is an intentional act which is both human and divine (John 1, 3). We need to be born spiritually to be part of God’s family. The human part of this intentional act is for us to receive Jesus, to believe in His name and to trust Him as our Lord and Saviour.

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The divine part will be done by God to accept us as His son and daughter.

Earthly relationships in a fallen world are hard. Healthy, life-giving relationships need work, commitment and hard thinking. When our relationship with God is restored, we will receive His blessing to help us with all our earthly relationships too.

Would we want to receive the best Christmas gift we will ever get – to become a child of God, to have a heavenly Father who loves us, who will help us overcome problems, fulfil our life purpose, and have a real relationship with Him? We may live for our dreams, but we are God’s dream. He sent His Son to us on Christmas Day so that He can bring us back into His Royal family. Would we come back to our Heavenly Father, the One who loves us and sent His Son for us?

And for those of us who know people who may be struggling with problems or relationships, we can be their support and encouragement by telling them Immanuel God is with us, He loves us and will help us if we let Him.

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