

“Immanuel”

Isaiah 7:14

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we begin this sermon series on the Messianic Oracles of Isaiah, it's appropriate that we sang *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, not just because it matches up with the text for today, but because of the message with which it closes each verse. “Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.” There is a dual promise contained within those words. Jesus Christ's first Advent has already come, and He has already dwelt among us, but His second Advent is still to come when He returns in glory to judge the earth in His righteousness. And so, we do as the hymn suggests, and we rejoice! We rejoice that He has come to be the propitiation for our sins and fulfilled the Law that we might have eternal life. And we rejoice that He has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light and has given us the hope of the resurrection that is to come in His return. We begin our series with rejoicing as we prepare for the coming of the Babe in Bethlehem, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and we will complete it with rejoicing as we prepare to welcome the Lord with loud hosannas on Palm Sunday as He comes into Jerusalem.

The season of Advent is one of repentance and also one of great joy. We are called during this time to reflect on the reason the Lord of all things has come into the world as we prepare for His birth of the virgin Mary. And as we reflect on our sinfulness that made it necessary for our salvation to be brought into the world in the person of Jesus, we look to the truths that are affirmed in the means of His incarnation and its importance to His salvific plan. Isaiah records for us that the Messiah will be born of a virgin. The Holy Spirit conceived Him, and Mary became the mother of God. The nature of His birth defies all natural logic and laws. How can it be that a woman would give birth to a son with no human father? The answer is simple and needs no enlightening from our reason. This is one of God's greatest miracles. He caused the seed of life to be placed into Mary's womb and Mary gave birth to her first-born Son, having never before known a man.

The virgin birth is entirely foreign to our human reason, and so attempting to explain it by our human reason is fruitless and without need. So many try to do it anyway and it always ends in heretical blabbering. Who are we to question the omnipotence of the one true God and claim Him a liar when He tells us that Jesus was born of a virgin? It shouldn't be surprising to us that the Lord is conceived in such a manner. After all, God spoke everything into existence with just the Word. He breathed

life into Adam, and He placed life into the womb of Mary keeping her clean and purifying her womb. A denial of this is a denial of Jesus' divinity, because if he was born of entirely natural means and had a human father, then He would not be God of very God.

But He was born of natural means, according to His human nature, which Isaiah affirms in that he says the virgin will "bear a son." He will be fully human—the son of his earthly mother. She did not conceive and bear a spirit, but a son, a living and breathing human. He was just as much a human being as you and me, and had all the properties of being so. Jesus was indeed a true man. While he was here on earth, he ate, slept, drank, wept, and walked just as we do. In terms of His humanity there was nothing exceptional about Him. He suffered the same fallacies we face, and this is evidenced throughout Scripture. When Lazarus died, He wept. After the devil tempted Him in the wilderness, He was weak and hungry. When He was on board the boat with His disciples, He slept in the bow of the boat. Every human feeling and experience was His the same as ours.

And what a treasure it is for us to know that. Our Lord and Savior doesn't just know our every suffering and need, He has fully experienced them. He knows what it means to feel pain when you ask Him for healing of an injury. He knows what it means to mourn when you ask Him to bring you peace in times of grief. And, even though He Himself was without sin, He knows what it means to bear the burden of your sin when you come to Him in repentance and ask His forgiveness. He knows the weight of that burden because He bore it to the cross as His human body was nailed to the tree for each and every one of the sins of the world. He felt the sin that was gladly taken upon His shoulders, and He felt every pang of death as He gave up His spirit. He was indeed true man as He breathed His last and went into the grave for you. But we cannot simply stop there, because, while there was nothing exceptional about Him in His humanity, He is no mere man.

He is also fully divine. No mere man could bear the weight of the sin of the world. And Jesus was able to do so because He is God in the flesh, and thus His name, Immanuel. **אֱלֹהִים עִמָּנוּ** means "God with us," which Matthew tells us in 1:23 of his Gospel account. The all-powerful Lord of heaven and earth has come to us in human form, in the person of the babe in Bethlehem, our Lord, Jesus Christ. He is both true God and true man, and He dwelt among us in the flesh as John says in his Gospel. It is His divinity that allowed Him the ability to be the all-atoning sacrifice for the sins of humanity. His divine nature was always present in His humanity, though He chose not to use it at all times. He had to be both God and man, and be subject to death as a man in order to pay

the price that the Father demands for our sins. The fullness of God's wrath was heaped upon Him, and if He were only a man, He would have been utterly obliterated. He suffered in our place as God of very God so that we might have eternal life and be one with Him in the fullness of His glory when we attain the glory of heaven.

The personal union of humanity and divinity in Jesus is a mystery we cannot fully understand in our human reason, but in what He has revealed to us we can understand these truths. He is "God with us" when He underwent the great agony of the cross to redeem us from our sin. He is "God with us" when He rose from the dead as the final seal of approval that His death atoned for our sin. He is "God with us" today in the pages of His Word in which He offers us forgiveness, life, and salvation. He is "God with us" as we leave here tonight and go about our daily lives in our vocations, living our lives of faith as He has called us to do. He is "God with us" in all that we say and do to the glory of His holy name.

The promised Messiah, Immanuel has come, and He has come to earth as true man and true God in the person of Jesus Christ. We cannot fully understand that, but we can confess it, just as Paul wrote to Timothy, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory (1 Tim. 3:16)." As those who trust in the Lord, we let the matter rest there in His revelation. Its meaning for us will never fade, however. We have a God who knows our every infirmity and trial that we face in this life, one who advocates for us before His Father in heaven as we face those struggles. We have an advocate who has suffered and died as the God-man and as such has removed the curse of the Law from us who trust in Him for our salvation. And in the comfort of that promise, we can look forward to what awaits is at life's end, when the Savior will bid us come home, to dwell in the light of His glory for eternity as we proclaim with all the saints, "Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel," as we await the day when He returns again in glory to raise the dead and fulfill His blessed promise of eternal life in our glorified bodies when we will have "God with us" in never-ending bliss. Amen.