

Christmas Sermon (#2)
Immanuel – God with Us
Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:22 – 23
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

When Pastor Bentley and I were preaching the gospel in Hong Kong, I saw that every year when the Christmas season was drawing near, there would be signs “Immanuel – God with us” or simply “Immanuel” everywhere: at the entrance of buildings, on the streets, at the front doors of houses. We could hear Christmas songs all the way from the central business district to the countryside.

But many people may not know the significance of this phrase “Immanuel – God with us”; what does it mean and where does it come from?

Christmas is the date Christians commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Around 700 some years before the Lord Jesus was born into the world, Yahweh God had proclaimed through the prophet Isaiah:

^{ESV} **Isaiah 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. (Isa 7:14 ESV)

Today I will not go into the debate of whether the word “virgin” here refers to a virgin or just a young woman, because that is irrelevant to our topic.

Now we fast forward 700 some years to the New Testament time: the apostle Matthew, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, quoted this verse Isaiah 7:14 to describe the incident of the virgin Mary who conceived and gave birth to a son.

^{ESV} **Matthew 1:22 – 23** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). (Mat 1:22-23 ESV)

These two passages Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:22 – 23 show that Immanuel refers to Jesus Christ, this being his title. And the original Hebrew word of “Immanuel” is **אֱמָנוּאֵל**, which means “God with us”.

A brief look at the history of Israel

To appreciate the significance of this title Immanuel, we take a brief look at the history of Israel.

1. The rebellion of Israel and the judgment of Yahweh God

King David was the greatest king in the history of Israel. His heart was wholly devoted to Yahweh God. After he passed away, his son Solomon became king. Yahweh God had granted great wisdom to Solomon. Solomon was the one who built the Temple of God in Jerusalem. But he had many foreign wives and concubines, and they turned his heart away from Yahweh God. Shortly after king Solomon passed away, Israel was divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom; the northern kingdom was still called Israel, the southern kingdom was called Judah.

People in both Israel and Judah were drifting away from Yahweh God to false gods. Yahweh God sent many of His prophets to call them to repentance, and to warn them about the judgment to come if they do not repent; but they simply ignored all the warnings.

Then God's judgment came! Around 722 – 721 BC the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the nation of Assyria, which was the superpower at that time, and the people of Israel were exiled to Assyria. The southern kingdom Judah still existed. One hundred some years later, in 597 BC the southern kingdom of Judah was conquered by the kingdom of Babylon; then 11 years later in 586 BC the Temple of God in Jerusalem was demolished completely, and the people of Judah were captured and exiled to Babylon.

Both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom were destroyed, and their people were exiled to foreign countries. But did Yahweh God forsake the Israelites? Yahweh God had made a promise to Abraham in ancient times that all people on earth will be blessed through Abraham's descendants.

^{NASB} **Genesis 12:2 – 3** And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Gen 12:2 – 3 NASB)

God's promise cannot fail! Yahweh God would definitely keep His promise to Abraham. But both Israel and Judah had been destroyed, so how would this promise be fulfilled?

2. The prophecies about the return of Yahweh God

Actually around 700 BC, which was before the southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed, the prophet Isaiah prophesied that all flesh would see the glory of God:

^{NASB} **Isaiah 40:3 – 5** A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; ⁵ Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see *it* together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isa 40:3-5 NASB)

The LORD (in all capital letters) refers to Yahweh God; “All flesh” in v.5 refers to all the people of the world; the Bible often uses the term “flesh and blood” or simply “flesh” to refer to people, human beings.

Here the prophet Isaiah was calling on people to prepare the way for Yahweh God because He would be coming. His glory would be revealed, and all people would see His glory.

After Isaiah made this prophecy, the Israelites who were still faithful to Yahweh God were waiting for His return. But both the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered and the people had been exiled to foreign lands. So when will Yahweh God be coming? And how will He come?

After 700 years had passed (this prophecy was made around 700 BC), John the Baptist came! John the Baptist came before the Lord Jesus, to prepare the way for the Lord; he was preaching in the wilderness and calling people to repent.

^{NASB} **Luke 3:3 – 6** And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight. ⁵ Every ravine will be filled, And every mountain and hill will be brought low; the crooked will become straight, And the rough roads smooth; ⁶ And all flesh will see the salvation of God.’” (Luk 3:3 – 6 NASB)

Verse 4 says that John the Baptist was the voice crying in the wilderness that the prophet Isaiah had talked about, which means that Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist; he was the one that Isaiah talked about, and the one calling people to prepare the way for the Lord.

When we compare these two passages, Isaiah 40:3 – 5 and Luke 3:3 – 6, we see that:

- Isaiah 40:5 says: “Then the glory of the LORD (Yahweh) will be revealed, And all flesh will see *it* together”
- Luke 3:6 says: “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God”
- So the salvation of Yahweh God manifested His glory; or put in other words, we see the glory of Yahweh God through His salvation.

When we talk about salvation, we are talking about our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed the original Greek word of the name Jesus is Ἰησοῦς (*Iesous*). According to the Greek-English dictionary, Ἰησοῦς (*Iesous*) means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh is salvation”.

^{NASB} **Matthew 1:21** “And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.” (Mat 1:21 NASB)

Now we look at these three passages together: Isaiah 40:3 – 5, Luke 3:3 – 6, Matthew 1:21. They show that the Lord Jesus is the salvation of Yahweh God (that’s the meaning of the name Jesus); it is through the Lord Jesus that all flesh will see the glory of God.

Yahweh God did not forsake His people Israel, for He has returned. But He did not dwell in the Temple in Jerusalem, but dwells in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Immanuel – God with us

After we look at the history of Israel briefly, now we want to see what this title “Immanuel – God with us” has to do with us.

^{RSV} **Colossians 1:19** For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell (Col 1:19 RSV)

^{RSV} **Colossians 2:9** For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily (Col 2:9 RSV)

The word “him” in these two passages refers to the Lord Jesus. Here it says that the whole fullness of God dwells in the Lord Jesus Christ, that means the Lord Jesus is the temple of God. Even the Lord Jesus himself spoke about the temple of his body:

^{ESV} **John 2:19 – 22** Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰ The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he

was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (Joh 2:19 – 22 ESV)

The fullness of Yahweh God dwells in the Lord Jesus; and the church is the body of Jesus Christ, which that means Yahweh God dwells in the church.

^{RSV} **1 Corinthians 3:16** Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (1Co 3:16 RSV)

Here apostle Paul is talking to the Christians in the Corinthian church; Paul tells them that Christians are the temple of God, and God's Spirit dwells within them.

I cannot imagine Yahweh God, the Creator of the whole universe, would dwell within me, such a privilege is too great, too awesome for me!

What should we do with such a privilege?

Today the Lord Jesus Christ is no longer on earth, but is sitting at the right hand of Yahweh God. Yet Christians are still on earth, so what should we do to manifest the glory of Yahweh God to the people of the world?

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, he manifested the glory of Yahweh God. When people looked at the Lord Jesus, they saw the righteousness and loving kindness of God. They could see Yahweh God through the life of the Lord Jesus.

^{ESV} **John 14:7 – 10** “If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. (Joh 14:7 – 10 ESV)

Today the Lord Jesus is no longer on the earth, but Christians are here on earth. The church as a whole is the spiritual temple of God, and each Christian is also individually the spiritual temple of God. The church and each individual Christian have the responsibility to manifest the glory of God to the world.

But most Christians today don't live according to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, not to mention that some of them are even living in sin. As a consequence, the Lord Jesus and the church have become a laughing stock. We know people attack the Lord Jesus and the church for various reasons, but we cannot deny the fact that the church and most Christians don't live according to the teaching of the Lord Jesus. As a consequence of that, the world despises the church, and have no respect for the Lord Jesus.

What is the best way to commemorate the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ? Not just with songs and praises, but with obedience and faithfulness to the Lord. If we live according to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, the church will once again manifest the glory of Yahweh God, and the world will see God in the church: Immanuel – God with us.