

Series- The Characters of Christmas (Part 3: Immanuel "God with Us")  
"Overcoming Loneliness"

Do you experience times in your life where you feel lonely? Even though you may have a nice home, food, clothing, shelter, friends, and a good church, you still experience those times where you feel lonely, isolated, disconnected. The **Washington Post** newspaper recently reported that an estimated **30% to 34%** of all Americans eat dinner alone every night. That's one-third of our nation eating alone every night.

While Christmas is supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year, for some of you, it may be the loneliest time of the year. Christmas just seems to magnify and intensify our loneliness.

I recall reading a story written by Pastor Jerry Vines, and Jerry Vines writes, quote, "One Christmas, we were on our way to celebrate the holidays with family members. We were driving through a small town on Christmas morning and passed by an old motel. By coincidence, I noticed there was only one car at the motel. As I saw that one car at the motel, I could not help but wonder, 'Who was in that motel? Were they all alone? What was their name? Why were they there? Is that where they would be all day on Christmas? And would they spend Christmas by themselves?' Jerry Vines goes on to say, "In hindsight, I wished I had stopped at that motel, knocked on the door, and invited that person to come celebrate Christmas with our family. It has bothered me for years, the thought of someone spending Christmas all alone in an old motel room."

You may not spend Christmas in an old motel room, but perhaps you can identify with the story I've just shared because you have experienced days of loneliness and detachment.

Perhaps these holidays are difficult because your husband or wife is in heaven, and while that's great for them, Christmas doesn't feel the same for you. Maybe your children or grandchildren or family

members are far away, and you will not see them this year. For some of you, there are broken and strained relationships, and Christmas doesn't feel like it used to feel. And while we should be celebrating the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, the most incredible miracle to ever take place, you may feel detached, lonely, and distant from God.

We may not want to talk about these feelings, but they are real, and they are powerful. Christmas just seems to bring out these feelings we may be trying to painfully hide. There is a word from God today. Whether Christmas is the happiest time of the year or the most difficult time of year, God reminds you and reminds me that he came to this earth that we might never, ever be alone.

Look in your Bible to Isaiah 7:14 and the Gospel of Matthew 1:23.

We're continuing our series of messages entitled The Characters of Christmas. Our message is entitled "Overcoming Loneliness."

**With the Christ of Christmas, you are never alone.**

There is a great yearning inside every person to know God. There is something inside us that wants to know our creator. We yearn to know that God has broken through into our world, and it's not enough to know that God is up there or out there somewhere.

We want to know that God has come down to where we are, he knows where we live, he knows our name, and that he cares about us. No one spoke more eloquently about this yearning in the human heart than Isaiah the Prophet. 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, during the reign of King Ahaz, Isaiah the Prophet predicted the birth of one who would be God coming to dwell with men and women. In Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah predicts an absolutely stunning event that will change human history.

*"Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel."* Fast-forward the clock 700 years later, and you come to the moment in Matthew 1:18

where Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, discovers that his fiancée, Mary, is pregnant outside of wedlock. Suspecting the worst, Joseph decides to break off his engagement. Remember, we said two weeks ago that engagement in Judaism at the time of Jesus was equivalent to marriage.

Joseph decides to privately spare Mary from public shame.... and an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, reassuring him that the baby inside of Mary's womb had been conceived through the Holy Spirit. The angel instructs Joseph to call the baby Jesus, which means "God saves," or it means "Savior," because Jesus will save his people from their sins. And then the angel quotes Isaiah 7:14 with its prophecy of the virgin birth.

Listen to Matthew 1:23. The angel was quoting a prophecy from Isaiah spoken 700 years before Christ. "*The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel,*" which means, or is translated, "*God with us.*"

You will notice that Immanuel, God with us, is spelled two ways. Sometimes it is spelled with an I as the first letter and sometimes spelled with an E as the first letter. The simple explanation is when Immanuel is spelled with an I, that is how it is spelled in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament.

When Immanuel is spelled with an E, that is how it is spelled in Greek, which is the language of the New Testament. Someone has counted that there are 365 names for Jesus in the Bible. That's one name for every day of the year. Of all the names of Christ, perhaps none is more significant than Immanuel, God with us, because it gives us his ultimate identity. He is God coming down from heaven in the form of a tiny baby.

Theologians call this the "Incarnation of Christ." This is a term that literally means "God in the flesh, God taking on human flesh, God being born as a human." John 1:14 tells us that the Word, that is Christ, became flesh and lived among us. The Word, who was God,

according to John 1:1, wrapped himself in human flesh. In the morning, you may wrap a robe around yourself. In the same way, the Son of God descended from heaven to Earth, and he wrapped himself in the body of a tiny Jewish baby in a stable in the tiny town of Bethlehem, tucked away in a forgotten corner of the Roman Empire called Judea.

Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. One writer, Richard Foth, says it like this: "*Jesus came to our place. He took our place. He invites us back to his place.*" This is the Gospel in a nutshell. Because of this name, Immanuel, God with us, there are some biblical truths about the Christ of Christmas that were true 2,000 years ago and are true for you and me today. With the Christ of Christmas at the center of your life, you are never alone.

#### Major Point #1

1. **Immanuel. God with us, means God is approachable to us.** Because God is approachable and accessible to us, this should give us encouragement when we experience times of loneliness. We must confess that God in the Old Testament was not always approachable. In Genesis 3:24, we see burning cherubim, these angels guarding the east gates of the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had been driven out of the garden because of their disobedience.

It's, as if God says, "Don't come near." In Exodus 3, God appears to Moses in a burning bush. It's a bush that seems to have some sort of asbestos compound in it, and when Moses gets close to God in the burning bush, God says, "Moses, don't come near." God meets Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, and God tells Moses to warn the people not to get too close to the presence of God at Mount Sinai or they will die.

When the people of God were traveling through the wilderness for 40 years, they had the Ark of the Covenant in the middle of their camp.

The Ark of the Covenant symbolized the presence of God with His people. And yet, according to Joshua 3, the people of Israel were commanded to stay 2,000 cubits, or about 1,000 yards, from the Ark of the Covenant. It was loud and clear when it came to God: "Don't come near."

God is the God of the nation of Israel corporately, but personally and individually, He doesn't appear to be approachable at times. He

is not accessible. The message was, "Don't come near. Don't get too close."

What a difference we see in the New Testament. God comes to Bethlehem in the form of a baby, and now we can come near... we can approach him. No one is too poor. He came as the poorest of the poor. No one is too small. He came as the smallest of the small. He came there the quietest of the quiet. So the quiet, the timid, the poor, the small, everyone can now approach the baby Immanuel, God with us. Instead of coming to earth in splendor in a gorgeous palace in one of the great cities of the ancient Near East, Jesus came to Bethlehem. After he lived for 33 years, this baby, Immanuel, God in the flesh, God with us, died on the cross, granting access and approachability to the God of the universe that the common Jew had never experienced before.

In Matthew 27:51, the Bible tells us that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The veil of the temple was this huge curtain that was on the outside of the Holy of Holies. The Jews believed that God resided behind that curtain in the Holy of Holies, and the holiness and power of God was so great only the high priest of Israel could go into God's presence once a year to atone for the sins of the people.

When Jesus died on the cross and the veil of the temple was torn in two, it sent a message to the Jews and to the world God is no longer in a designated space. He no longer resides in a temple made with human hands. God is approachable, and every believer has access to the God of the universe. Hebrews 4:16 says something incredible. We can come "confidently, boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in a time of need."  
Heb.4:16

Do you realize that the great God of the universe, Immanuel, God with us, is approachable and acceptable to you? Let me tell you how incredible Immanuel is, God with us.

Put yourself on a small beam of light traveling at 186,000 miles per second, which is the speed of light. As you travel on that beam of light, travel a billion years, another billion years, another billion years, and you still would not be out of this corner of God's creation. (Our galaxy; The Milky Way)

That's how great Emmanuel is, God with us. Tonight, if the sky is clear, look up into the sky and find the North Star, Polaris. This is the star upon which we sight the world's compasses. When you look up and see that North Star called Polaris, just remember that the light that strikes your eye left that star a thousand years ago. That light ends its ten-century journey as it strikes the retina of your eye.

So whenever you say, "Immanuel, God with us," you should not take it lightly. On the days when you feel lonely, on the afternoons when your heart is sad, on the nights when you can't sleep, be reminded you have access to an incredible, powerful, loving God that says, "I am Emmanuel. I am with you." Emmanuel, God with us, means God is approachable.

### **Major Point #2**

#### **2. Immanuel, God with us, also means God is actively present with us.**

Immanuel, God with us, means God is actively present. When the prophet Isaiah and the Gospel writer Matthew says in Matthew 1:23 that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, it literally means, in the language of the New Testament, God sharing with us, God alongside us, God intimately involved with us. The biblical writers are communicating that God is not only approachable, but he is now actively present with us today in the here and now and in the present tense.

Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in a time of trouble." You may say, "Pastor, I feel lonely in my times of temptation." Immanuel, God with us, says to you, "I was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. I am with you in that

temptation." "I feel so lonely at the death bed of a loved one." Immanuel, God with us, says, "I know what it is to face death. I was nailed to a cross." "I feel so lonely at the grave of a family member." Immanuel, God with us, says, "I too stood at the grave of a loved one by the name of Lazarus." God with us in the wilderness of temptation, God with us at the death bed of a loved one, God with us, actively present at the grave of a family member.

I like what the psalmist says in Psalm 139:7-10. "Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"... if I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths of Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there, your hand will lead me." At every moment of life, God is there. You may go to the desert or the depths of the ocean, and God is there. In every condition of life, weary, thirsty, hungry, grieving, or lonely, God is actively present.

There was an ancient Asian ruler, a monarch who, in his last days, passed an order that his son would succeed him as king. When the older ruler died, his son became king, and according to the custom of that land, the king had never been seen publicly. His reign as king was shrouded in mystery. He was a good king. There was peace and compassion in his rule. Sensitivity, law, and equity were marks of his leadership. One day, there was a group that wanted to see the king who ruled over them. This group gathered in the courtyard outside the palace. "We want to see the king," they exclaimed. Finally, the king granted their wish and came out in his garment of splendor, dazzling before the people as a hush grew over the crowd.

One man shouted, "I've seen him. He stood by us and wept when our baby died." Another said, "I've seen him. He helped me when I was lonely and in despair." Another one said, "He came and fed us when we were hungry and destitute." And one by one, each person acknowledged, "We've seen the king. He walked among us and we didn't even know it." I have a feeling when we see our Lord and King, Immanuel, God with us, we will be tempted to say, "I know

him. He was with me when I needed him the most. and I didn't even know it.

Immanuel, God with us, means God is approachable, God is actively present.

### Major Point #3

### 3. Immanuel, "God with us" means God is available to all of us.

If we're not careful, there's one little phrase that can go overlooked in this verse.

In Matthew 1:23, in the New International Version it says, "They will call him Immanuel, which means God with us." We may not pay much attention to the NIV's rendering of this verse, but if you have King James Version, this verse reads, "They shall call his name Immanuel, which being *interpreted* is God with us." In the New American Standard Bible it says, "And they shall call his name Immanuel, which *translated* means God with us." The keyword in the King James and the NASB is the word *interpreted, translated*.

What's the significance? What is the big deal? Emmanuel is a Hebrew word for God written in Hebrew characters for Hebrew people. The last two letters of the word Emmanuel are EL which is the ancient Jewish name for God from which we also get the name for God, Elohim, E-L-O-H-I-M. Isn't it interesting that when Matthew penned this verse in Matthew 1:23, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to interpret or to translate that Hebrew word for God "Immanuel" into the Greek language?

It's as if he is saying, "For you Greeks that don't read Hebrew, Immanuel means translated, interpreted, "God with us." In other words, this verse is not only for the Jews, but Immanuel, God with us, it is for the whole world. It's for everyone. Immanuel is available to everyone who will call upon his name. With inserting that one word in verse 23, interpreted or translated, this Gospel of Immanuel was not limited to the Jews who were living between that narrow strip of land from the Mediterranean and the other seas.

No, this good news of Immanuel, God with us, must be shared and made available in the Greek language for the 100 million people who were living in that Greek-speaking Mediterranean basin at the time of Jesus Christ. And now today, on the second Sunday in December, 2025, because of that little word, Immanuel there are millions of Christians today throughout the world who are worshiping in hundreds of languages who are able to proclaim Immanuel, God with us.

God with us in Spanish. God with us in German. God with us in Ukrainian. This God, Immanuel, is a God that is available to every man, woman, and child. It's not a narrow sectarian message for one corner of God's creation. It is a message that is for all who will believe on the name of Jesus. Immanuel, it's translated God with us.

Do you know this approachable, present, and available God? Do you know him in a personable way?

Do you have a personal relationship with God's son, Jesus Christ, Immanuel? You can know him today. As a matter of fact, you can begin your relationship with Jesus Christ right now. I can't think of a better time to become a follower of Jesus than at this Christmas season. I cannot promise you that life with Jesus will be easy, but I can promise you that you will never face the problems of life alone. Jesus promises us that when we feel lonely, "He will never leave us nor forsake us." Hebrews 13:5

With the Christ of Christmas, you are never ever alone.