

Isaiah 7:14: God With Us

OUTLINE

The virgin shall conceive
Immanuel

INTRODUCTION

If I had to sum up Christmas in one word, it would be Immanuel—God with us! Some might think holidays; family; gifts, but for the believer it is about Jesus. He is the one who reveals God to us in His incarnation; He is the one who becomes are substitute in His incarnation; He is the one who saves us from our sins; He is God come to rescue us. Many talk about the need for some holiday cheer. The world is a hard place and there are many unhappy people, and so a little holiday cheer can make the world a better place. That is true more than people know. The world is much worse than people realize as we live in a fallen world, subject to sin and death, with the prevalence of satan manipulating sinful human beings through their sinful desires, all the while we are stacking up sins against God as we head towards a day of reckoning. The world is worse than we ever realized, even taking all the wars and bad things into account. And Christmas really does make things better. But it is not just by putting a smile on people's faces; or including the lonely; or focusing on family and making children feel safe and fulfilled in a loving home. Christmas makes the world a better place because Jesus is Immanuel.

For our meditation upon the incarnation and what it means for us, we will be turning to a familiar passage, Is. 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.' Matt. 1:20-23 helps us to see that this verse is talking about Jesus, 'But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).' Matthew even emphasizes the significance of the name Immanuel by translating it for his readers. Today we want to think about this prophecy which foretold the how and the who of God's plan of salvation. It is a sign given to indicate a most powerful reality, God with us.

We will look at this verse under two headings, firstly looking at the virgin birth; and secondly, the name Immanuel.

The virgin shall conceive

Let us look at the original context of the prophecy. Isaiah prophesied during the life of several kings of Judah. This particular prophecy was given to King Ahaz v1a. The situation was very precarious for Judah. Assyria was growing in power in the north, they were collecting power and would soon become the major power in that area. To stop this Assyrian growth the countries north of Judah, namely Syria, and the Northern tribes wanted to conquer Judah and put one of their own dummy kings in place that these nations could then unite and resist Assyrian expansion. We see this situation in v1b with the kings Rezin and Pekah

about to siege Jerusalem. This put immense pressure on the nation and the king who were very fearful, v2. The prophet Isaiah is sent with his son Shear-Jashub whose names means a remnant shall return, while Ahaz is inspecting the city's water supply in preparation for the impending siege, v3. God has message saying don't be fearful these enemies who are plotting against you will be dealt with v4-9 even foretelling the coming destruction of the Northern tribes by Assyria, v8. Ahaz however, is in an alliance with Assyria and is not relying upon God. He has given gold from the temple to incite Assyria to attack these nations rallied against Jerusalem. So there is a warning in v9, 'If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.'

It is at this point that God invites Ahaz to ask for a sign and God will prove His intent to save His people by fulfilling the sign, v10-11, 'Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: ¹¹ "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." Ahaz is not willing to trust in God and hides behind the excuse of not testing God, v12, 'But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." Ahaz is then rebuked because it is of course not testing God if God tells you to ask for a sign, v13, 'And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?' It is at this point that we have our famous verse, v14, 'Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.'

It is at this point that we have to discuss the nature of the prophecy given here. There are two ways to interpret this prophecy. A single level fulfillment or a double level fulfillment. One school thinks that God is giving a prophecy of a far off deliverance, namely the virgin birth, and this is the only referent. I belong to the double level way of seeing things here. I believe that there is a near fulfillment and a far fulfillment. We can see more of the near fulfillment in the other details that are present. God is offering Ahaz a sign that will underline how quickly He will deal with these enemies which look too strong for Judah and due to succeed in their plans. V15-16, 'He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.' In the first fulfillment God is saying this, as long as it takes a virgin to marry and have a child, and before that child is of a discerning age, these enemies will be dealt with. But Matthew helps us to see that the words of this prophecy are pointing to something greater as so often happens with Messianic prophecy. Think of 2 Sam. 7:12-16 as you listen to this prophecy I want you to think of a first level immediate fulfillment, and a second level far off fulfillment in Christ, 'When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.' Solomon fits with the details here in a way, but a literal fulfillment is found in Christ alone. Solomon is a son of David who sits on his throne, but His throne does not endure forever. In the same way Matthew under inspiration of the Holy Spirit helps us to see how this prophecy in Is. 7:14 is not exhausted by a first level fulfillment, Matt. 1:22-23. We can see that the prophecy is thicker than the original fulfillment, how it points beyond itself and a

literal reading is fulfilled in Christ. He is literally ruling on His throne forever; and He was literally born of a virgin; and He is literally God come in the flesh, God with us.

We rejoice in the reality of the virgin birth. The virgin birth is absolutely necessary for our salvation. The virgin birth where Jesus humanity is sinless but made from Mary ensure that Jesus is a child of Adam. This means that He can represent us in His law keeping and both as a priest and a sin offering for our sins. The virgin birth ensures that Christ is sinless. It is because He is sinless that He is qualified to be the Second Adam who can obey where the first failed; and die in payment for our sins as an unblemished sacrifice. No virgin birth, no salvation. We do not worship Mary; we do not pray to Mary; we do not see Mary or anything that she does as contributing to the cross work of Christ for our salvation. But we do hold her in high esteem. She alone was graced by God for the honor being the vessel that brought Christ into the world; who nurtured and raised Jesus as her son.

Immanuel

I remember when we had a German exchange student stay with us. She had been taught in High School about the JEDP theory and other theories of biblical criticism that tried to say that the Bible was a hodge podge of human authors who had put a book together and called it God's word. I remember taking her through the various prophecies of Christ showing how the Bible is more than a human document but is the very word of God, the various prophecies proving this point. She argued and wrestled with this, and one day she came back to me asking this question, 'If Is. 7:14 is a prophecy of the virgin birth, why is her child called Immanuel, if Jesus was what the child was supposed to be called?' I thought this was a very good question as she was cross referencing Matt. 1:21 where Joseph is told to call the child Jesus, but the prophecy calls Him Immanuel. Is this a contradiction? No, names were also given as titles. If you go to Isaiah 9:6 we see this happening again, 'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' From the very first name that was given where Adam named his wife Eve, after the fall, which means Mother of the Living Gen. 3:20, referring to the promise of the Seed/Savior that would be born of a woman, the people of God have been in the habit of giving names that speak of God and His salvation. God uses names to reveal Himself and aspects of His work, and here He gives a name to Jesus Christ which is pregnant with meaning.

So let spend some time thinking about all that is stuffed into this one name, God with us, Immanuel.

Firstly, let us think of it as it would have been understood in the first level fulfillment. The Southern Tribes of Judah are about to be besieged, Jerusalem and the temple are surrounded. The Davidic bloodline is being threatened to be removed from the throne and a dummy king put in place. But the people of God are in covenant with God, and God is a covenant keeping God. He has promised that He will be their God and they will be His people. God often gives names to children to show His intent towards His people. For example the prophet Isaiah had to name a son Shear Jashub which means a remnant shall return foretelling both an exile and return of His people, highlighting both His justice and His grace. God being with His people in their immediate need is part of what is

being conveyed. Being under attack from strong enemies they need someone stronger than their enemies, God is stronger. The fact that these enemies are on their very door step, they need someone to be present to engage the danger, God is promising to be present. In accordance with the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant God will defend His people and fight against her enemies.

But the fact that this verse is pointing supremely to Christ means that we need to see the significance of this name in light of who He is and what He has come to do. When we apply this lens the first thing that strikes us is the fact that in Christ God is literally with His people. John's gospel makes this clear. John 1:1, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' V14, 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.' V18, 'No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.' Jesus has come as God in the flesh to make God known to us, to reveal His grace and truth, that we might come to know God as our Father. Jesus is God come near in revelation. He is the way to the Father, the truth of the Father, and the life from the Father.

But more than that, the fact that God has to affirm His fellowship with us reminds us of the basic problem of our separation from God. God originally dwelt with man in the garden. Then sin came and God had to kick us out of His presence, or He would have to judge us. The rest of human history is the story of God reconciling a sinful people to Himself through Jesus Christ. In the OT God dwelt among His people, but when God draws near to dwell among His people, we have to be holy as He is, His laws have to be enforced, sinners must be judged. We see that God has to set up a priesthood, a sacrificial system, a tabernacle, all to deal with the sins of His people, simply so that He could be present and not have to put the sinner to death. Even the in time of the Patriarchs worship was with a sacrificial offering. But now Jesus with His one perfect and sufficient sacrifice is able to pay for all of the sins of all of God's people making the way open to God. The temple curtain has been torn as a sign marking the end of this separation, and we can now go into the very throneroom of God in Christ. Jesus is God come near in reconciliation.

But more than that the Father; and the Son; and the Holy Spirit now all dwell within each believer through the Spirit of Christ. John 14:23, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.' We see a wonderful demonstration of this newness when the Spirit is poured out on the day of Pentecost, and just as we saw the glory of God over Solomon's temple, we see that ever believer is a temple. This is a glorious reality. Right now if you are a believer God is with you. He is not only for you in Christ but personally with you. He will be with us even unto the end of the age; He will never leave us or forsake us. Christ dwells in each one of us by His Spirit. This is so practical for us in our daily needs, here is how one person I read applied this truth to our fears, 'Think of your fears. Fear needs a person. When a child wakes up in the middle of the night, crying inconsolably, what does she do? There is no peace until she is in the arms of her loving mom or dad. She runs to find them, and even an attuned parent will run to meet her in her distress. The tears may continue, and her heart may still race. But by the comforting embrace of her parents, she is eventually consoled. Peace floods her heart, and she can rest again. Fear needs a person. Immanuel, God is with us.'¹

¹ <https://www.challies.com/sponsored/immanuel-and-our-fears/> accessed 12/22/2023

We may feel lonely like orphans with no one who cares, no one who loves us, no one who will take care of us. Jesus has not left us as orphans He is God with us.

But there is more. We have been sent on a mission, to take the gospel to all nations, to go into a world that does not want our message, and who reject their Savior, we go into a world where satan is influencing everything to stand against us. But He is Immanuel, 'we go not forth alone against the foe' Matt. 28:18-20, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

But there is more, the greatest threat we face and fear is death, but because Jesus is our God, and has resurrected from the dead, we need have no more fear of death. Psalm 23:4, 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.' If you die while holding the hands of your loved ones, at some point you will leave them behind. But nothing can separate us from Christ.

But there is more, He is our teacher, our comforter, our friend, our intercessor, our bridegroom, our shepherd, and more. He is God, and He is for us, and He is with us. What more could we want or need?

But there is more, one day we will see our Savior face to face and we will never be out of His presence physically never mind spiritually. We will be forever with the Lord. Rev. 21:1-4, 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Jesus is our Immanuel. Do you know Him? He was born of a virgin to save us from our sins to be God with us in all of our need. Have you received Immanuel as yours? As you think about Christmas and the reason for the season think deeply about this one word—Immanuel.