

*Christmas Eve*  
**December 24, 2011**  
**Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke**

Matthew 1:22-23

*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.” (NIV)*

It’s almost a shame to even preach this Christmas Eve night and the next morning on Christmas Day! The message itself is so sublime, so perfect, and so beautiful! I believe the best thing any pastor can try to do is just get out of the way, keep it simple, and let the good news be heard. When we hear the message Christmas brings how can we also not then fall on our knees with the shepherds to worship and adore? We have come to receive Him, and with the saints and angels we sing His praises for keeping His promise to come to us.

As we focus this evening on these two verses in Matthew, we come across an amazing word – Immanuel. What a word that is! Because finally it was here: the day of Immanuel. Perhaps there is no other word that captures the meaning of this Holy Season better than the word Immanuel—God with us. “God be with us” could be words we speak in a prayer as we want God near and desire His help in time of trouble. These words could also be a benediction, a blessing, or a wish for God to be with us. In fact, every time we bid someone good-bye, we are sharing that blessing Immanuel, for “good-bye” is simply an abbreviation of “God be with you.” Immanuel is a philosophy and a theology in itself. It was a word spoken by God nearly 700 years before it was spoken once again by God to tell us Jesus is Immanuel. So my prayer for us on this Christmas Eve is that we sing and see and savor the truth that is: **Immanuel**.

The setting of these verses tells us about Joseph who was pledged to be married to a young girl named Mary. But Joseph had found out that Mary was pregnant before they were together in marriage. Joseph, as a good man, did not want to disgrace Mary so he decided he would end things with Mary quietly. While Joseph was considering this, one night in his sleep an angel appeared to him in a dream with some unbelievable news. Mary was not unfaithful to him. The angel tells Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit! He tells Joseph she will give birth to a son and they are to give Him the name Jesus, which means Savior - for that is who He is and that is what He comes to do – save his people from their sins!

Then the angel tells Joseph this: ***“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”*** While all this had to be a somewhat head spinning for Joseph and no doubt left him a bit bewildered, God wanted him and us to know this was not some whim or random act. God had planned this. God had foretold this. Through Isaiah 700 years earlier God gave wicked king Ahaz a sign that he would not even ask for, a sign that his people would be safe from their enemies. This sign was that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. God promised a miraculous birth. The angel tells Joseph this was all taking place to fulfill God’s plan. Mary will give birth to this special son, ***“and they will call him Immanuel.”***

Immanuel – a word that says so much! For Immanuel, which means “God with us,” reveals to us the identity of the Child which Joseph and Mary laid into a feedbox on

that first Christmas night. Here was God with us. Here was God becoming a little lower than the angels – God becoming true man. Could God love you any more? God is born in a barn! That is the length our God is willing to stoop to be with us. He takes on human flesh and blood and becomes one of us.

Oh, how we needed and how we still need Immanuel!! I need God to be with me or I am lost. All people do whether they recognize it or not because ***“in Him we live and move and have our being”*** (Acts 17). We would not be able to take a single breath or last a second without God’s creating and sustaining power. And that’s not even beginning to mention how I need God with me in times of suffering and trial. Don’t we need God with us? Don’t we want God with us? Yet, there is a reason far greater we need God to be with us. For without Immanuel not only would I be lost here on earth, but I would be lost eternally in hell.

We all need Immanuel because none of us could have ever achieved heaven on our own. Take a good deep look at your life this past year. Without even knowing everything that has happened in each of your homes I know one thing that was present all year – sin. There was lying and cheating, greed and envy, gossip and slander. There were times our thoughts were evil and occasions where our words were hurtful. Our actions certainly were not always in line with God’s commands, commands such as obeying our parents or worshipping regularly to name just a couple. We sinned against God and sin separates us from a Holy God here on earth and for all eternity.

But Immanuel! Immanuel, Immanuel, Immanuel! Jesus is our Immanuel! The reason God came to be with us as true man is so that He could live for us – a perfect sinless life. The reason God came to be with us is so that He could die for us - so that His perfect sacrifice on a cross would count for everyone - to pay for all the sins we have done or ever will commit. The reason God came to be with us is so that He could rise triumphant from the grave so that death forever loses its’ hold on us. Immanuel means we have peace with God. With our sins washed away in Jesus’ blood God with us is a reality here on earth and forever in heaven. Immanuel means we now have nothing to fear - not in life or in death! Immanuel!

A tourist in New York once stood at the top of the Empire State Building and looked down. As he viewed the people on the sidewalks, they looked like ants running around. He said, *“I imagine this is the way the people of the earth look to God.”* But not our God dear friends! Not Immanuel, the God who comes to be with us on Christmas—not the God who loves us so much that He takes on flesh and is laid into a manger—not a God who becomes man so that He might die on a cross to save us! Our God does not just peer at us from above. He comes down to us and for us. He is still with us and will be with us to the very end of the age. He is with us on good and on bad days and will be with us even in death for He is and always will be Immanuel. So don’t talk about bringing Him a present—not tonight. Tonight He is the only present! Just receive! Just sing! Immanuel—God with us! Amen.