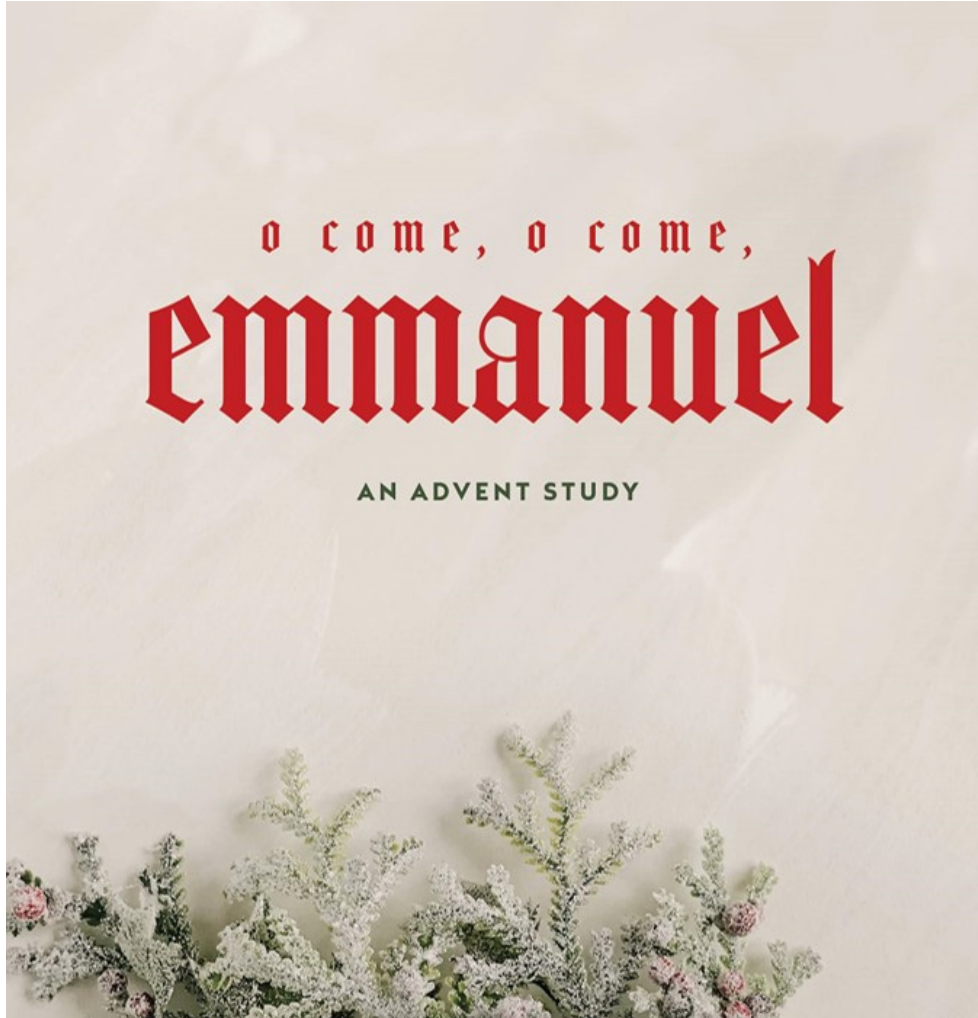


# Emmanuel—God With Us

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



## Prayer of Illumination

Speak to us, Lord.  
Speak to us in the waiting, the watching,  
the hoping, the longing,  
the sorrow, the sighing, the rejoicing.  
Speak to us by your Word in these days of Advent,  
and walk with us until the day of your coming.  
Amen.



So let's hear now the Word of the Lord from:

**Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25 (NRSV)**

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

**SERMON: Emmanuel—God With Us**

*O come, O come, Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel*

We have to talk about the elephant in the sanctuary. A burning question that must be cleared up and answered once and for all...

How do you properly spell Immanuel? Is it with an E or an I ?!!! The definitive answer is this: YES.

- Immanuel with an I is the transliteration of the Hebrew into English—so when found in the Old Testament, it's Immanuel with an "I."
- Emmanuel with an E is the transliteration of the Greek into English—so when found in the New Testament, it's Emmanuel with an "E."

Personally, I'm a fan of spelling Immanuel with an "I"—but we're not biased at Immanuel at all. Well, now that we have that settled, we can look at Joseph.

The birth story in Luke's gospel is seen through Mary's eyes—a joyful young teenager. But the birth story in Matthew's gospel is seen thru Joseph's eyes—who is more understated. We don't know a lot about Joseph. He was a carpenter. King David was in his family tree. He was betrothed to Mary. This was the second of three phases in ancient Jewish marriage customs. First, there was engagement that was arranged by the parents when their children were young. Second, there was the year-long betrothal that was legally binding, but the husband and wife lived apart and had no marital relations. Third, there was matrimony—full-fledged marital bliss.

Matthew tells us Joseph was a just man—or as one translation puts it—"a man of principle." As we just read in our gospel reading, Joseph understandably agonized over Mary's mysterious pregnancy. Joseph loved Mary. He didn't want her exposed to public disgrace, so he was going to quietly divorce her. But with the angel's command in his dream, Joseph was willing to change course and trust God's plan.

What's interesting is that through all of this, Joseph never speaks in the gospels. But he listens to God loud and clear. His actions were informed by his listening. His actions spoke louder than words. Joseph believed God spoke through dreams, angels, scriptures, and circumstances. And so he heeded the angel's message that he was to name the child, not one name, but two names. To name a child was to formally claim the child as your own. When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took Jesus under his wing as his own adopted son.

In Hebrew, the word listen doesn't merely mean to hear. You have only truly heard when you've obeyed, when you've acted in accord with the word spoken to you. Joseph may have been a man of few words, but he listened all the time. He paid attention. According to some scholars, the root word of "religion" is "lig" which means to pay attention. In that sense, Joseph was a religious man too. He paid attention. He prayed attention. His actions were informed by God. Joseph was first to hear the name to be given to the Savior of the world: Jesus, Yeshua, or Joshua in English which means "the Lord saves."

It was and is a popular name. It was Joshua who completed what Moses started. Joshua helped lead Israel out of their lonely wilderness exile and into the Promised Land. Jesus came into this world, not for himself, but for others and for our salvation. He was a man for others. He came to "ransom captive Israel" and free us from the tyranny of sin. But Joseph was told the additional name the holy child was to be given: "Emmanuel—God with us." This was a much less popular name. The meaning of the name was too much to bear for any boy except for one—Jesus. "God with us." The role of Jesus is to bring God close to his people, to the world. And God will save his people. Not from a distance, but up close. It all began here with the angel instructing Joseph to also call Jesus "Emmanuel, God with us," quoted from the book of Isaiah in the Hebrew Scriptures.

It ended with Jesus telling the disciples before his ascension, "And lo, I will be with you always." In other words, "I'm Emmanuel—God with you, even when I'm gone." But not only in the beginning and the end, but in between, when Jesus says during his earthly ministry, "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them." "Emmanuel" is near.

Jesus was a man and historical figure who walked this earth, but he was so much more than that. He came from the Holy Spirit. This Jesus, a child, would be different from all children before and after him. The inconceivable happened. He was conceived of the Holy Ghost. In Jewish thought, the

activity of the Spirit was always connected with the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One. The Holy Spirit brought truth to the world. The Spirit gave words to the prophets to proclaim. The Spirit now gave God's very Word in human form to the world.

Before Jesus, Emmanuel, our ideas about God were shadowy. But now God can be seen, touched, heard, and followed. You can talk with him, break bread with him, keep company with him. "Whoever has seen me," says Jesus, "has seen the Father." In Jesus, Emmanuel, we see and encounter:

- the love of God
- the compassion of God
- the grace of God
- the forgiveness of God
- the character of God in real time.

Jesus tells us the truth about God and the truth about ourselves. And the Spirit opens our eyes to the ultimate reality that Jesus, the one who saves us from our sins, is God with us.

Jesus, conceived of the Spirit, has the power of the Spirit which is the life-giving power of creation and re-creation. He makes us frail creatures a NEW creation. Emmanuel's creative power brings order to our chaos, order out of our disordered lives. Emmanuel's power brings presence to our absence, exodus to our exile, pardon to our conviction, and light to our darkness. Jesus, the breath of Heaven, breathes new life into our sin-sick souls, hope into our despair, and resurrection into our crucifixion.

The coming of Jesus, Emmanuel, reminds us that God is present and God is at work in surprising ways in each one of us. We can relate with that. God is now present and among us in a new way, a personal way—in a human being. Through the incarnation, the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, we can have personal knowledge and a relationship with God.

We are a God-inhabited people. We can be Christlike.

This is the God, this is the Jesus who rescues us when all our options are exhausted.

This is the God, this is the Jesus who clears new avenues and entries when we're at a stand-still or at a dead-end in our lives.

This is the God, this is the Jesus who snatches us from the jaws of death and provides us abundant, eternal, and everlasting life in the here and now.

And so this Advent season is a time of watching and waiting and praying to the God who is near, to the God who is coming to us. O Come, O Come Emmanuel—God with us.

Amen.

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