

## ***FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH SERMON OF THE WEEK***

### ***EMMANUEL***

#### ***Matthew 1:18-25***

The Christmas story is such a simple story. About two thousand years ago in the little country of Israel, which was then under the control of Rome, a young woman fell in love with a man who was a carpenter by trade. They lived in the little Galilean town of Nazareth. Both of them were very devout in their faith. After they were engaged, but before they could be married, the young woman had a visitor from heaven, an angel of God to call on her. He informed her that she was to be the mother of the long awaited Messiah. When she wondered how this could happen since she did not have a husband, the angel told her that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her, and bring about the conception in her womb of the child.

As the story unfolds, an angel is sent to reassure Joseph of the trustworthiness of Mary and to enlist his support. The good man accepts the word of the angel, and commits himself to be the helper of Mary. Both of them are informed that the Child is to be the Saviour. In the passing of the months, they must travel to Bethlehem for a registration time decreed by the Roman Governor. While they are there, the Baby is born in a stable at night because there was no room for them in the inn.

God used Matthew and Luke to give us a careful record of this event. As Matthew recorded his knowledge of the event, he tried to carefully show how the events were the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. In doing this he turned to Isaiah for a word spoken during the reign of King Ahaz. While the inclusion of this statement from Isaiah has created problems for some Bible scholars, it serves to bring before us the mystery and the message of Christmas. You will not comprehend the greatness of the mystery, or the glory of the message until you see that the One born to Mary is really Emmanuel. This Hebrew word brought forward into English means literally God with us.

#### ***I. EMMANUEL---THE MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS***

There are three aspects of the mystery of Christmas suggested by this name. First, there is the mystery of prophecy. The word of Isaiah was written during the reign of King Ahaz, some eight hundred years before the birth of Christ. God was speaking through the prophet to bring about faith to a king in a time of severe national crisis. Yet in the word delivered to that king of Judah, there is a word about the birth of a Child eight hundred years later. The character of the mother and the nature of the child are foretold in exact detail. Other prophets foretold other details of the Christmas event. Micah named the town for example. How do we explain the phenomena of prophecy? In a world in which God has granted to man so much freedom, how could anyone know for sure what will happen and

where centuries later, or for that matter, next year? The answer is simply one of faith. Isaiah did not have psychic powers more than others. He simply wrote down what God revealed to him. The God of Christmas is a God of infinite knowledge and power. And He is also a God who reveals Himself and His purposes to man. But one of the wonders of Christmas is the phenomena of fulfilled prophecy. Before you reject the Christmas story you need to consider this.

There is also the mystery of the Virgin Conception. We often speak of the Virgin Birth, but the Bible actually presents an emphasis on the Virgin Conception. Obviously conception precedes birth. The unique thing about the birth of the Babe was the manner in which He was conceived. The birth seems to have been normal in every other aspect. But according to the inspired record, the same Spirit that brooded over the formless chaos of creation in order to bring about a universe, overshadowed this young woman from Nazareth. He brooded over her. As a result of His activity, conception took place in the womb of Mary, and she brought forth her first born Son.

This aspect of the story bothers some people. They have sought other explanations for the birth. Some have claimed that Joseph was actually the Father. Others have claimed that Mary became involved with some soldiers that were stationed near Nazareth. But no one has determined why such a story would have been manufactured by Matthew and Luke. Those of us who have come to know the Son of Mary by placing our trust in Him find the record to be consistent with what we have experienced. To the people of faith, it just seems to fit. He is so unique in other ways, why should His birth have not been unique. It is one of the mysteries of Christmas.

But the greatest mystery of all is the mystery of the Incarnation. Isaiah had predicted that the child uniquely born would be justly called Emmanuel. By this the prophet was not suggesting the personal name that He would bear, but rather how He would be recognized. He was declaring that is would be viewed as "God with us." He would be the in flesh manifestation of the eternal God.

Do you understand this? The Christian faith declares that God Himself was with us in the body of Jesus of Nazareth. That when Mary held the new born Child in her arms that first Christmas morn, that she held her Creator and Redeemer in her arms. This surely must be the most staggering claim of the Christian faith. The question of the world is always, "But how?" No answer can be given! The Christian is confronted with the truth of it, believes it, and falls on his face before the Babe to worship. It is wondrous, and mysterious. It is truly a marvel. The Babe born to Mary is Emmanuel! So this title of Christmas brings before us the wonder and marvel of Christmas.

## ***II. EMMANUEL --- THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS.***

that a message! Have you ever considered what this says to us about God? If the Babe in the manger is really Emmanuel, God with us, think about it.

Think about the "us". If God is going to be with anyone, who will He be with? If God is going to make a personal visit to the earth He made, who will He want to see? There is a message for us in the people of Christmas. What we have in the Christmas story is God with a group of poor and outcast people. At best Mary and Joseph were poor peasants. When Mary went to the temple to offer a sacrifice for purification, she did not offer a lamb or goat. She could not afford that. Rather all she took was two birds, the very cheapest sacrifice. Joseph worked with his hands.

We have made romantic figures out of the shepherds, but history would tell us differently. The shepherds of that day were usually outcasts. They were often accused of having "sticky fingers", and petty thievery, They would never be found on any social registry, and were never members of the best clubs in town. Most of us would have felt very uncomfortable in the circumstances into which Emmanuel came. But this is very encouraging to me. You do not have to be among the "high and mighty" of the earth to have God with you. In Jesus Christ by manifesting Himself He has demonstrated forever His readiness to be with all men. Read the Gospel record. Make note of the people that Jesus was "with". Remember He is Emmanuel. Surely if He was "with" all of that group, He will be "with us".

Think about the "with us". Where? Where will God be with us? Do we dare consider it! In a small Jewish community! Outside a crowded inn! In a stable! In a manger! In the humblest and poorest of circumstances you find Emmanuel. Too often we have thought that you have God "with" you in a quiet religious setting where you have stained glass and quiet organ music. Or you might have God with you during your quiet time in which you are performing spiritual exercises. But the message of Christians is God with us in the cow stall, where the only music is that of cows and sheep sounding off. The life of Jesus Christ is a revelation of God with us all of the storms and crisis of life, in illness, in death, in pain, in sorrow, in sin, and in joy --- He is there. He is at the wedding feasts and he is at the funeral. He is in the sunshine and He is in the storm. He is Emmanuel.

A rather humorous incident brought this home to me some years ago. It is humorous now, but was not so funny at the time. I had been visiting during the afternoon on the field of my first church. I was on my way home driving down a very narrow, treacherous mountain road. Along the way I passed a man I had known through the years, and stopped to give him a ride. Parks was a man with the body of a Samson, but the mind of an eight year old child. As we were driving down the road, we were involved in an automobile

accident. I was probably driving a little too fast when we came around a curve, met a car in which there was not really room for two cars comfortably. We bumped fenders, and my car went down an embankment through some tall weeds and bushes. Fortunately the car did not overturn. When it finally stopped, gratefully I turned to Parks and said, "Parks, the Lord was with us." He didn't say anything, but just grunted, and I think silently made a resolution never to ride with me again. When someone came along to help us, I overheard Parks say to someone, "D.L., said the Lord was with us, but I don't believe He was down there in those bushes, do you?" Well, I did then, and I do now. Indeed, the God who came to us in Jesus is the God who will be with us wherever life may carry us, and in whatever messes we may make of it. He is Emmanuel.

But think about "God" with us for a moment! God? There He is in the arms of Mary, and in the manger. Why? Surely if God is going to be with His sinful creatures it will be to condemn and destroy. Surely judgment is the only thing a Holy God could have for His creatures. O glory to God in the highest! Emmanuel reveals something different. God is with us to save and deliver --- God is with us to be whatever we may need. This is the revelation of God that comes to us in Jesus Christ. If Jesus is the revelation of God, then the heart of God is full of mercy and grace. Jesus never met a need he did not meet.

Do you know the ultimate answer to "why?" The Babe is the arm of Mary on the way to the Cross. God has become Man that as the God-Man He might die for us. This is the message of Christmas.

### ***CONCLUSION:***

The God with us in Jesus is a God I can trust and worship. Ever once in a while I meet an agnostic or even a self-professed atheist. I like to ask them "Now which God is it that you do not believe in?" Often their minds are filled with such perverted ideas about God, that I assure them that "I do not believe in that God either." The God I believe in is the God who was with us in the Babe of Mary. All I know for sure about God is that which He has revealed of Himself in Jesus from Nazareth.

I want to invite you to place your trust in this God this Christmas. You can go forth singing the songs of joy if you can know that the God of Jesus Christ is with you all the way.