

"Immanuel: Our God-with-Us" Matthew 1:18-21 Christmas Eve 2022

“Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.” Over the past four weeks, Christians around the world have sung the great, ancient Advent hymn. In Isaiah 7 the prophet declares to King Ahaz this sign of God’s faithfulness: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Is. 7:14b). The blessed apostle and evangelist St. Matthew brings to mind these words of the prophet, for in the fullness of time the prophecy would be fulfilled in the birth of the infant Jesus—Immanuel (which means “God with us”). This Jesus, whose birth we celebrate this evening, came to be with His people and to save them from their sins. What moved the Son of God to do this, to humble Himself and be born of a virgin? Saint John writes: “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (1 Jn. 4:9), and again: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). Yes, Jesus Christ—true God—came down from heaven to be born as one of us, to live as one of us, and to be with us, our God-with-us, your God-for-YOU.

But on this holiest night of the year, it can be difficult to believe or accept that He is truly with us. We lose sight of the one thing needful:

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to hear the Word of the Lord, the Word-become-flesh, and to be still and know He is God, our God-with-us, your God-for-YOU. Stores have been crowded with last-minute shoppers, whether shopping for gifts or for the fixings for Christmas dinner. Travellers come from near and far to be with friends and family. And some families come to terms with an empty chair at the dinner table for the first time because a loved one has died within the past year. It's hard to think of Jesus in the midst of our busyness, in the midst of our grief. It doesn't help that the devil uses these things to distract us from Him, to not fix our eyes on Jesus. We cannot and dare not say that everything will turn up roses because we believe in Jesus, but we can be comforted in knowing and firmly believing that He makes our pain, our suffering, and our frantic pace more bearable. The One whose birth we celebrate tonight is our Rock, our Fortress, and our Might, our God-with-us, your God-for-YOU. Jesus says to you, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30), and again, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20b). Jesus is with you always; He is your God-for-YOU.

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You have a God who loves you: God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. His love for you is deep and vast. Jesus says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (Jn. 3:16-17), and St. John writes, "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [payment] for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:9-10). The Babe of Bethlehem would go to the cross at Calvary and die for you and for the life of the world—THAT'S your God-for-YOU. He bled and died for you, and He rose again for you, that you would have eternal life with Him. Even as Jesus came down from heaven into the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, so also does your Lord come down from heaven into your ears by the power of the Holy Spirit working through His Word, the same Word you heard tonight in the story of your Savior's birth, from the first promise of the Messiah to the announcement of His birth to the revealing of His incarnation (His enfleshment) and to the proclamation of Jesus being our Immanuel—our God-with-us, your God-for-YOU, this holy night and always. A blessed Christmas to you all. Amen.