

## The Names of Jesus series “Immanuel” (God With Us)

Welcome to the “Names of Jesus” preaching series that’s going to take us through Christmas.

Approximately 750 years prior to Jesus’ birth, the nation of **Israel and Judah** were living in tumultuous times politically. By far the largest and most powerful nation was the nation of **Assyria** and they were waging war and winning against everyone and rapidly expanding around the world. They are represented on the map by the purple kingdom on the top. The kings of **Syria and Israel** led a rebellion against the king of Assyria and tried to convince **Ahaz, the king of Judah**, to join them in this revolt. But Ahaz was not a godly king and refused to join them. Therefore the kings of **Syria and Israel came and threatened to wage war against Ahaz** and the **nation of Judah**. All of Judah was living in great fear that at any moment they could be conquered by one of these nations. In the midst of this God **sent the prophet Isaiah** to king Ahaz to reassure him that He was in control and that these nations would not conquer Judah. God told Isaiah to go to king Ahaz and reassure him that God sees his predicament and not to fear for God will take care of these mighty armies. Then he tells Isaiah to instruct Ahaz to **ask God for a tangible sign** that will confirm this promise. But Ahaz turns down God’s request to ask Him for a sign. He says, *“I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”* That’s what you call **“false humility”**. For you see, he was already hoping and planning on striking up an alliance with the King of Assyria. Asking God for a sign would interfere with Ahaz’ own plans (which, by the way, ended up being very costly for Ahaz and all of Judah).

However, God’s pretty insistent on giving Ahaz a sign. Here’s God’s response to Ahaz’s refusal to accept the sign God wanted to give him.

**Isaiah 7:13-14 (NIV)** *Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him **Immanuel**.”*

If you don’t know Hebrew, this may not seem so extraordinary, until you understand that the word **Immanuel** means *“God with us.”* God’s promise to Ahaz was that a woman who was a virgin was going to give birth to a child and this child will be literally God’s presence with them.

This prophecy and promise fell on deaf ears to evil king Ahaz but it should have been great news. Because God’s presence is what many of the Israelite leaders craved down through the ages and God’s presence is what often made the difference between military success and failure between life and death.

- **Moses**: when God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses kept trying to convince God that he wasn’t the right man for the job. God’s promise to reassure Moses was that he would be going with him into Egypt (Ex. 3:12)
- **Moses on Mt Sinai**: After receiving the second set of 10 commandments, God instructed Moses to lead the Israelite nation away from Mt. Sinai and into the Promised Land. But God told Moses that because of His anger with them over the Golden Calf incident that He would not be going with Moses. But Moses refused to lead these people even one step unless God promised to go with them. So the Lord changed His mind and promised to go with Moses (Exodus 33:14) and the Israelite nation.
- **Joshua**: when it came time for Joshua to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, he reminded Joshua on several occasions that he would be with them each step of the way (Joshua 1:5.9.17:3:7)
- **Gideon**: when God showed up to Gideon and called him to lead the Israelite nation against the mighty Philistine army he promised that He would be with him in battle (Judges 6:12).

- **The list goes on and on as to who God promised to be with them:** Kings Saul and David and Solomon. And through many of the prophets God repeated this tremendous promise that he would be with the nation of Israel .

I believe that all of these repeated promises by God to be with His people is not just a promise of protection but is also a **reflection of God's heart**. He created us, not because He was bored or because He wanted to show off. It's a reflection of God's heartfelt desire to live in connection with His people. And it's this desire for a relationship with us that is at the heart of the story of Christmas. Don't miss that the story of God coming down and being born as a little baby – is ultimately about **relationships**. God restoring and reestablishing His relationship with His people whom He loves.

The great evangelist, **John Wesley**, got it exactly right with the last words out of his mouth before he died. With his last breath John Wesley repeated the same sentence twice. He said, "**The best of all is this: God is with us. The best of all is this: God is with us.**" He nailed it. Because it's one of the main things that sets Christianity apart from all other religions. All others religions are about us trying to get to God. Only Christianity reverses that and says that' it's primarily about God coming down to us.

The best part of Christmas shouldn't be the **presents we receive**, but the **presence of God with us**. Christmas means that God loved us so much that he came to live **with** us, and die **for** us so that we can live with Him forever. That's the significance of John 1:14.

**John 1:14 (NIV)** *The Word became flesh and **made his dwelling** among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Eugene Peterson in The Message translation says, "*The Word became flesh and blood **and moved into the neighborhood.***"

Fast forward 700 years from when the prophet Isaiah made that prophecy to king Ahaz and we see it repeated as the angel repeats it to Joseph.

**Matthew 1:18-23 (NIV)** *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

*20 But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

*22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him **Immanuel**" (which means "**God with us**").*

It's taken 700 years, but what God promises He fulfills. And while Ahaz turned down this remarkable promise, God is faithful and He carried it out for us through Joseph and Mary. God was very determined that His coming to us and making it possible for us to come to Him would happen. And unlike Ahaz, who turned down God's sign, here the sign uttered through the angel turned everything around. Because up until this point Joseph was ready to quietly divorce Mary as his wife, but after this he went and took Mary as his wife and together they eagerly awaited that day when God left his place in heaven and came to us.

Let's dig a little deeper and look at those three powerful words individually: **God With US**.

## **God With Us:**

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God.** 2 He was with God in the beginning.* (John 1:1-2 (NIV))

The apostle John makes it crystal clear in the first words of his account of the life of Jesus, that the person identified as “*The Word*” is God and is eternal.

And then later he makes it quite clear that the Word became one of us.

**John 1:14 (NIV)** *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

So, right at the beginning of John’s Gospel he makes an astounding statement that Jesus is God in the flesh. Not just a representation of God, not just a prophet, as some religions claim, and not just a really powerful and persuasive teacher. Jesus is God living among us.

Also, John adds more evidence that Jesus is God when he records Jesus claiming the very name of God for Himself. It’s the same word that God used to describe Himself to Moses at the burning bush: “*I am that I am.*”

**John 8:58-59 (NIV)** *“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” 59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.*

Note: the Jewish authorities understood exactly that Jesus was claiming to be God. And the punishment for blasphemy is death by stoning. That’s what they are trying to do here.

When Judas and the soldiers came to arrest Jesus he once again used God’s name to describe himself and everyone there immediately fell to the ground out of fear for the misuse of God’s name.

**John 18:4-6 (NIV)** *“Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, “**I am he,**” they drew back and fell to the ground.”*

When **Thomas** finally saw Jesus a week after his resurrection, he calls him “*my Lord and my God*” and Jesus doesn’t correct him that he’s not God. Earlier in the Upper Room he had told his disciples that if they’ve seen him they’ve seen God.

Think of how remarkable the fact that Jesus is God is. All other religions teach us ways to try to get to God, through advanced knowledge or good works etc. Only Christianity reverses that and says that God left his lofty place in heaven and came down to us – so that we could be reunited with Him.

## **God With US:**

It’s one thing to know about God or to have an experience with God vs. being with God. In the Old Testament people who encountered God were most often fearful of Him. He came across as scary and all consuming. But Jesus came to remove that scariness factor with God. They were reminded of that yearly when in the observance of the Day of Atonement, only the high priest could go behind the curtain into the Holy of Holies in the temple where God would descend into. Access to God was highly restrictive.

However, when Jesus died on the cross that very large veil was ripped from top to bottom symbolizing that the dividing wall of separation between us and God had been removed. And every person has the opportunity to have their sin forgiven and to have God live with and within each of them.

In the Upper Room with his disciples, Jesus promised to them and to us that he wouldn’t leave us like orphans but that He would give us his very presence, in the person of the Holy Spirit, to live within us – to be God’s presence with us. And so God lives within every one of us as His abiding and empowering presence. Through the Holy Spirit, God draws us initially to a relationship with Himself and then once we accept Jesus Christ, God places His very presence within us to equip us to

live the Christ-like life He's planned for each of us to live. For the rest of your life God never leaves you. That's extraordinarily great news.

### God With **US**:

Who's the "us" that God came to? Perhaps that might be best answered by who the angels gave a personal invitation to first to come see Himself lying in a manger in the barn. God invited the lowly angels to be the very first visitors. Not the socially or politically or religious elite. He didn't invite the wealthy or educated and powerful. God intentionally invited the lowly often stinky shepherds who probably never got an invitation to any sort of important event. But for the most important event in all of history God hand picked a bunch of shepherds.

The truth is that God comes to every one of us and invites us to accept Him as their Lord and Savior. And if we choose to accept that invitation, then He comes and lives with you and inside of you forever. That's what Jesus referred to when he said:

Jesus replied, *"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."* (John 14:23 (NIV))

One glorious day Jesus will come back and take all of his children to go live with him forever in a place called heaven which is being especially prepared as we speak. Let's close this sermon together by standing and reading this incredible verse together.

**Revelation 21:1-3 (NIV)** *Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*