

Four days until Christmas . . .

- How many of you have all your shopping done?
- How many haven't started yet?
- How many of you did at least some of your Christmas shopping online this year?
- Online shopping has definitely made things easier, but it's not without its pitfalls.

I was visiting my dentist this week and he told me an interesting story about online shopping.

His college-aged daughter, asked her dad if she could use his Amazon account to make a purchase.

I think she wanted to buy a shirt, not an expensive item, probably less than \$30.

So he gave her his log-in info so she could make that one purchase.

What his daughter didn't know is that dad has some interesting on-line shopping habits.

If he spots an item for sale that he thinks, might be something he would want to consider buying in the future, his default is to just move that item to his shopping cart.

Apparently dad was unaware that Amazon has a feature called "**save for later.**"

And so, something that he wants to save for later, he just stores in his shopping cart.

His daughter had never encountered this kind of on-line shopping behavior before, so she just added her one item to his cart, and then without even looking at the contents of the cart, just proceeded to check out.

Imagine her surprise, not to mention dad's, when the one item she bought arrived with about \$600 worth of other merchandise that dad had been "thinking about maybe someday buying."

Dad lovingly told her, "***I guess you know what you'll be doing after Christmas - - Amazon returns!***"

Digital technology has changed our lives.

And I know it kind of freaks some people out.

I have a friend who was creeped out when she got into her car to leave her home one morning, and her navigation system began calling out instructions, even though she hadn't told it where she was going.

And certainly the idea of Alexa listening in on, and recording your conversations and then without your knowledge passing them along to your friends can be a little bit unsettling.

I don't know where you land on this whole Artificial intelligence thing and whether you feel like it's a blessing or a curse.

I was kind of on the fence, until this week when I read an article online in

Newsweek

<https://www.newsweek.com/robot-just-debated-humans-benefits-risks-ai-1474083>

Talking about this very subject.

This issue reported the results of a debate that took place between a robot and humans over the dangers and benefits of AI.

The robot took the stage for this debate at the Cambridge Union in the UK

Arguments in defense of Artificial Intelligence made the case that it could generate new jobs and bring greater efficiency to the workplace.

Arguments against AI pointed to the fact that robots are incapable of making moral decisions.

In fact the robot himself told the audience that . . .

"AI can cause a lot of harm," and that it will not be able to make a decision that is the morally correct one, because morality is unique to humans."

At the end of the day, the robot won the debate and narrowly convinced the audience that this new AI technology will do more good, than harm.

I wonder where you weigh in on this subject?

Because it's Christmas time, I wanted to share with you one family's Christmas newsletter that might be giving us a glimpse of what the future might look like if the robots have their way . . .

Chiron Beta Prime Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3DyxaCYlfg>

Is that what the future will look like?

We'll have to wait to find out.

What I would like to do this evening is to look back, to that very first Christmas and remind ourselves of what happened there.

We're continuing our series "God With Us"

And I want us to begin by looking at the first time that **This Name of God** appears in the Bible is printed at the top of your notes . . .

Isaiah 7:14 says . . .

"All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel!" **Isaiah 7:14**

Seven centuries before that first Christmas, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah made a promise.

Isaiah saw a time coming in the future when God would not be distant from His people, so under the inspiration of the H.S. he prophesied that God would come to earth and be with them.

And that's what we're remembering this morning

The gospel writer Matthew describes the events of that first Christmas with these words.

Matthew 1, beginning at verse 18, he writes . . .

“This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 1:19

“Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.” Matthew 1:19

“As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. ‘Joseph, son of David,’ the angel said, ‘do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’” Matthew 1:20-21

“All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: ‘Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’” Matthew 1:22-23

Would you read these last four words together with me out loud?

‘God is with us.’”

That's what we're looking at this morning.

Immanuel: God With Us

Three questions about this name. . . .

1. What Does It Mean?

Immanuel: God With Us

It's an amazing claim. . . .

That this little tiny baby lying in a manger is actually GOD

He's not “a god”

He's not just a “good teacher”

He's not just a “prophet” or maybe even a representation of God

The Bible says that JESUS is GOD

And that truth, that claim has divided people for centuries

What is it about Jesus that polarizes people?

Why is the name **Jesus** such a fork in the road that forces people from one side to the other.

Maybe it's **HIS EXISTENCE**

Maybe just the claim that he was born 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, that he was a carpenter's son, who walked this earth and taught, and healed. . .

But the more you think about that the more you realize that the existence of Jesus isn't the problem

Even non-religious historians will quote Jesus, or reference him in different ways.

Even people who aren't religious at all are willing to accept Jesus as a first century historic individual.

They will refer to him as the “founder of the Christian faith”

If you travel to Israel you can see where Jesus was born, and where he was baptized, you can see the Mountain where He gave the Sermon on the Mount, and the place where he was crucified and the tomb in which his body was laid.

So it's really not the EXISTENCE of Jesus that is a problem for most people.

Well if not that, then what?

Maybe it's his **TEACHINGS**.

Maybe people get bent out of shape over what he TAUGHT.

Maybe they look at his teachings and think “That is so far off-base. There's no way that He could teach that.”

Sounds good.

Except that when you examine the teachings of Jesus you find that most people who look at them appreciate those teachings.

People who look at those teachings will tell you that the world would be a better place if we followed his teaching about how we should “love our neighbor”, and “care for the poor and the hurting and the outcast and the oppressed.”

Most people don't find fault with his teachings.

So if it's not the issue of his EXISTENCE or his TEACHINGS that people struggle with, what is it?

It's what we're looking at today.

It's the Bible's claim that He is GOD.

God with Us.

You see the problem is that he doesn't say

“I'm a lot like God. . . .

He doesn't say

“I'm god-like”

He doesn't say

“I'm godly”

He doesn't say

"I'm a representative of God"

Or,

"I've come with a message from God"

He says "I AM **God with us**"

He says that he left heaven and came to earth to be **with us**"

That's what IMMANUEL means

"GOD WITH US"

Next question.

How did He do it?

Short answer - - - - I have no idea.

I mean I can tell you what the Bible tells us.

In a section where the Apostle Paul is teaching on humility (Phil. 2:5-8) he says. . .

5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Several key things in that passage. . .

First of all

Jesus Christ in heaven, before coming to earth on that first Christmas possessed and shared with God the father the very same nature.

He was not god-like.

He was not sort of God

He was as the son, as much God as God the father was.

Second thing I see here is that even though he had this. . .

"EQUALITY WITH GOD" - - - he didn't look at it as something to cling to. . . .

He was willing for a time to give up his divine privileges, to lay them aside.

To let go of them.

To make himself nothing and come to earth as a baby.

This is something that theologians call

The KENOSIS

And it comes from the Greek word for "emptying"

And for centuries debate as gone on as to what exactly it was that Jesus laid aside or let go of when he left heaven and came to earth.

And the truth is we don't know.

What we do know is that in the incarnation he was 100% God and 100% man

Not some sort of a hybrid

Not a 50/50 mix.

But do I understand it?

Not even close.

Can I explain to you how the creator of the universe stooped down and entered the world as a newborn baby?

No way

But the Bible says it and I believe it

Even if I don't understand it

Why did He do it?

He did it because God wants to be **WITH US**.

Not just near us

Not just alongside of us or in front of us or behind us or above us but **with us**.

Really the whole Bible is the story of WHY God did this. . . .

It's told in many many places.

One of my favorites is

2 Corinthians 5:21

Talking about Jesus and what He did in leaving heaven and coming to earth and going to the cross for us it says.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Jesus did what He did in leaving heaven and coming to earth and going to a cross for us so that He could. . . .

TRADE OUR SINFULNESS FOR HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Why?

To restore what was got broke back in the Garden of Eden.

Before the fall of man in Genesis 3, man and woman enjoyed a kind of a friendship with God where they could walk with him and talk with him.

When they sinned, that relationship was broken, and God because he is Holy, could not have friendship. . . could not have a relationship with sinful man.

And for all of our trying we could not fix that problem

We couldn't make ourselves holy enough to stand in the presence of a perfectly holy God.

So Jesus came down from heaven to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

To accomplish a transaction whereby our SINFULNESS is exchanged for his RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Without that we could never stand before God.

We don't want to accept that.

And so, to make us feel better about ourselves, we don't compare ourselves to God and his holiness.

We compare ourselves to on another.

We all kind of want to do judgment by comparison

Maybe you had a teacher or a coach who at some point said **"Just do your best"**

The reason God came is because your best wasn't good enough

There was no way that you and I could ever work our way up to him, so he came to us.

We were created as **ETERNAL** beings.

We were designed and destined to spend eternity somewhere.

The problem is. . . apart from the work of Jesus we can't spend that eternity with God, but only separated from him.

So part of his reason for coming was to. . . .

Take Us Up There

Or as the Christmas Carol says. . . .

"To fit us for heaven to live with thee there"

That's **part of the purpose** for the incarnation. . . for Immanuel. . .for God with us. . . .

It's to **TAKE US, UP THERE.**

But you know what.

That's not exciting to a lot of people.

I mean, don't get me wrong.

They're glad that there's a heaven

They think it's a good thing

And they want to go there when they die, but they're not really in any particular hurry to make the trip.

Like the two guys who have been having this life-long argument over the question. . .

"Will there be baseball in heaven"

It's a fair question, because a lot of people think that heaven is gonna be filled with whatever makes you happy here on earth.

These two guys loved baseball.

They **loved to watch it** and they **loved to play it.**

So they continually debated the question ***"Will there be baseball in heaven?"***

They make a deal that whoever dies first will come back and let the other one know if there is baseball in heaven.

One of the guys dies, comes back in a vision, and says to his friend,

"I have good news, and I have bad news.

The good news is there is baseball in heaven.

The bad news is you're pitching Friday."

Now **why would that be bad news?**

The reason is we're kind of ambivalent about this idea of heaven.

We put it in the category of **"Things we'll think about later"**

And if that was all that this name of God meant. . .

Taking us UP THERE

It wouldn't mean that much to us until we got to a place where we realized we were closer to making that journey.

But there's

Another Part to IMMANUEL - - - "GOD WITH US" and that is to. . . .

BRING UP THERE DOWN HERE

The vast majority of the Bible is **not about** us going up, the vast majority of the Bible is about God coming down.

That's the main message

"God with us"

Are you going to heaven?

If you've accepted Jesus Christ into your life. . . made him your Savior and King. . . are following Him. . . .been baptized into Him. . . .and had the Holy Spirit take up residence in your life. . . are you going to heaven?

Absolutely- - - you're going to heaven!!
 Don't doubt that for a second.
 But also don't get so preoccupied with GOING UP
 That you forget that He CAME DOWN to be right here WITH US.
 And he came to do at least two things. . . .

Immanuel Came To COMFORT The AFFLICTED

He loves to do that. . .
 He loves to comfort those who are hurting.
 Look at the next verse on your notes. . . .

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of
What????

all comfort, who

Does what????

comforts us in all our troubles..." 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

We are have hurts.

Some of you have experienced a significant loss in your life.

It could have been through death,

It could be through the pain of divorce.

It could be just that relational junk that gets into our families and lives and just messes everything up.

It could be a major health issue that your fighting in your own body or in your own family.

It could be a financial issue that you're

When God is with us, He loves to comfort the afflicted.

He loves to comfort those who are hurting.

How does He do it? Well, Isaiah gives us a great picture of the comfort of God

"As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you."

You have to admit, there is nothing like the comfort of a mother.

If a kid falls down and hurts their knee, they don't usually run to daddy, they run to mommy. "Mommy, kiss it and make it all better."

I was reminded of that when our oldest had just turned into a teenager and was going to have to have surgery and stay overnight in the hospital.

I asked her if she would like me to stay there with her overnight, and she told me that no, she wanted mom.

I asked her why.

She told me, ***"Dads are for fun. Moms are for comfort."***

Like a mom, Immanuel comforts us.

But he didn't just come to Comfort the Afflicted

He also came to

Immanuel Came To AFFLICT The COMFORTABLE

Do you hear the tension?

There's something about the presence of God that makes comfortable people uncomfortable.

When the angels talked about the birth of Jesus, they said, ***"Glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth and good will to all men."***

We like that

But what did Jesus say?

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Matthew 10:34

There is something about the presence of Immanuel that afflicts the comfortable.

Maybe some of you are feeling that right now.

You walk into a church when there is not a relationship between you and God, or that relationship is strained for some reason and it'll make you nervous.

What are they going to do here?

What are they going to say?

I shouldn't be here.

Something's not right.

That's a good thing because that is God disturbing your comfort and leading you to something better.

A guy came up to Jesus who was COMFORTABLE

He had material wealth. . . he had a good life. . . he had his own form of religion. . . but he knew something was missing.

And so he asked Jesus, ***“What good thing do I need to add to what I’ve got and what I’ve done to inherit eternal life?”***

Jesus said, ***“You know the commandments. . . Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.”***

The man said, ***“I’ve kept all those since I was a boy.”***

Jesus said, ***“One thing you lack. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”***

The man went away sad.

He arrived **COMFORTABLE**

He left **UNCOMFORTABLE**

Jesus **COMFORTS the AFFLICTED** and he **AFFLICTS the COMFORTABLE**

The people in Jesus day who were the most UNCOMFORTABLE around IMMANUEL were the religious people.

Sinners enjoyed being with him

Religious people . . . not so much

Jesus made people who were COMFORTABLE with their own form of godliness. . .their own form of religion. . . UNCOMFORTABLE.

It’s the same way today.

He is a lightning rod

A dividing point.

Have you ever noticed that today, ***you can talk about God or spiritual things*** and there’s ***not a whole lot of controversy.***

In fact, that’s kind of popular, but as soon ***as you bring up the name Jesus***, you draw a line in the sand and there’s tension.

The name of Jesus divides people. . .

Do you remember Jesus hanging on the cross at Calvary?

As he is in the midst of the most excruciating and brutal and painful death that anyone can imagine, the crowd begins to mock him and even one of the thieves who is being executed with him joins in.

He taunts Jesus and at the same time he makes a desperate request.

He says . . .

“One of the criminals hanging there insulted Jesus by saying, “So you’re really the Messiah, are you? Well, save yourself and us!” Luke 23:39

At that moment Jesus knew something that the man hanging next to him did not know.

Jesus knew that he could choose one or the other, but not both.

He can save himself or he can save us.

But he cannot do both.

He came to save us, and he was willing to lay down his life to do that.

The Bible tells us that Jesus came so that “God could be with us.”

Our **MEMORY VERSE** for this week, is actually three verses . . .

Matthew 1:21-23

“And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: ‘Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’” Matthew 1:21-23

I want you to notice something about the first verse of those three

Matthew 1:21

The angel’s message to Joseph

Matthew 1:21

Speaking to Joseph about Mary the angel said. . .

“And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Now unpack that for a moment.

God With Us? Msg
Always
Sermon preached by Dr. Rick Mandl
Eagle Rock Baptist Church
December 21 & 22, 2019

First half of the verse.

“And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,

Do a little research on that name (Jesus) and find out what it means.

If you do, you'll discover that the Greek name JESUS is the same name as the Hebrew JOSHUA.

And what it means is **“JEHOVAH is SALVATION”**

Nothing really remarkable in a mother in that day naming a child Joshua/Jesus

It was a statement of truth **“JEHOVAH and he alone. . . no one else is the one who saves”**

That's not remarkable. . .

What is remarkable is THE REASON the angel gave for Mary giving her son this name

He said, “You are to give him the name “JESUS” - - - Jehovah is salvation. . .

Why?

Because **HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE** from their sins.

What does the name mean?

JEHOVAH is salvation

Why are you giving HIM the name?

HE will save his people?

Who is he?

He is Jehovah.

Immanuel - - - means God/JEHOVAH with us.

When Jesus is with us, God is with us.

I don't know why he wants to be with you.

I don't know why he wants to be with me.

But he does.

And the same God who was with Mary

That same God promises to be with you and to be with me, and he keeps his word.

He is with us because He is Immanuel

Most of you here this evening, if you take the time to look back at your life and think about it, I'm sure you can think of a number of times when Immanuel has been with beside you, and you felt his presence, and you sensed his protection, and you experienced his love and grace and forgiveness.

Jesus Christ is the perfect gift

He's the perfect gift for the person who has everything

He's the perfect give for the person who has nothing

God promised back in the book of Isaiah to come and to dwell with us.

And He did

And He promises you and me that he will never leave us or forsake us, and He won't

And if you place your trust in Jesus Christ, God promises to take up residence in your heart and he will

Let's pray . . .

Father thank you for what you went through when you allowed Jesus to come to earth.

Thank you for what Jesus gave up and for what we have gained.

Thank you for Jesus that he is our savior from sin, our deliverer from death, and that He is Immanuel – the God who is with us always.

It's in his name that we pray.

Amen.