

V. Advent in Biblical Perspective
Life Portraits from the Nativity
“Christmas Eve—Emmanuel: God with Us”
John 1:14
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
December 24, 2019 • 5:00 p.m. Sermon

This is the fifth study in our Advent series and we will look at Emmanuel, the very name of the Messiah who has come to save us from our sins. This will come as no surprise to those in our congregation but I’m not very musically gifted. My musical gifts probably extend to giving a hymn book to someone, but I am musically affected. It is a glorious design of God where we can take solid Biblical theology and put it to melody and harmony and sing it from the heart and to the heart. Music can set a nail in the heart with theological truth and that is glorious. There are so many of them that cluster around this glorious time of the year where we sing of the joy of fulfilled anticipation. For 400 years God has been silent and now He speaks finally in His Son. We have now the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament prophecies, symbols, shadows, types and narratives that are fulfilled in Christ in whom all of the promises of God are yes and amen. The message goes out through the angels, then the shepherds and then the wise men. It’s a message that says ‘Joy to the world for we bring you Good News of great joy that Christ has been born, the Savior’ and it can be sung by all.

Here at Briarwood as we begin to plan out all the Advent services sometimes I will say to our music director ‘John, let’s sing...’ and I’ll mention a certain song. Then he will say ‘Which arrangement?’ Of course I have no idea so I’ll have to tell him ‘since I can’t hum a few bars you’ll have to figure that out on your own.’ We will note when we put up the song on the overhead who has done the arrangement to the song. So why do they do these arrangements? They do them because there is some lyric they want to highlight musically with some combination of notes they want to emphasize that will make a profound impact deeply within the heart.

That is really what we have in the Bible. We have the story of the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ who has come into the world and the Holy Spirit led the writers of Scripture to arrange the account with different emphasis. The Apostle Paul tells of this glorious birth of Christ with a glorious hymn that he writes that was incorporated in the early the church. We find it in Philippians 2:5–8 which says *[5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* He humbled Himself to be born and then to die for our sins.

We see it in John 1:1–5 which says *[1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* Now this Light is coming into the world. Also in John 1:14 which says *[14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

We also see it in Luke where he brings the emphasis of Christ through Mary, even giving us a genealogy in Luke 3, emphasizing the faithfulness of God to His Word by the choice of this

One who would be the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah 7:14 says [14] *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* Not only would there be a virgin conception and a virgin birth but she would even be kept by her husband as a virgin unto the birth itself so that there would be no doubt that this was not another son of Adam. This is a new Adam that has come to raise the sons of earth that we might have a second birth. Luke also brings us to that glorious moment in the fields of Bethlehem, the birth announcement of Christ. Luke 2:11 which says [11] *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

Matthew takes us away from the appointed mother to the adopted father. These are all the same events but with their arrangements they are emphasizing certain themes so that when we want to take a look at something specific it is covered in one of their arrangements. These compositions have all been put together so we can see this historical event that happened in history. People wonder did this really happen?

Lately we hear a lot of the word ‘impeachment’ in our history. Impeach is when you throw something over, when you render it obsolete. There were multiple opportunities when these Gospels were written in that very first century to impeach the witnesses. Can you, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wise men, angels and all who read these Gospel accounts affirming them as true? This truth stands unblemished but all of these arrangers of this Gospel event with their different emphasis have brought us to the focal point and that’s the manger. It’s not Mary, Joseph, the wise men or the shepherds for these are all attendees to it and they become attendants to that King when they get there.

This is why it is so important what is said to Joseph. Matthew 1:18–25 says [18] *Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way (in other words this is a historical event). When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit (here is the fulfillment of the prophecy to Isaiah). [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. [20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

[23] *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”*

(which means, God with us). [24] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

One month out of every Sunday we have the privilege to celebrate Christian baptism – the baptism of believers or of the children of covenant families. At this particular time I will say ‘Father name your child and the blessing.’ That formula comes out of the Old Testament where they didn’t have the sign of baptism but of circumcision. Baptism has now replaced that but it would be the same formula. Joseph has something to say; His name is Emmanuel and the blessing is that He will save His people from their sins. Joy to the world, the Lord has come! So here is this phenomenal moment.

You can see what is going through Joseph’s mind, can’t you? The four steps of marriage in the Bible were commitment, consent/betrothal, ceremony and consummation. There is a time during these steps that you considered husband and wife without the privilege of intimacy and

then you would have the ceremony and consummation. Clearly Joseph and Mary had been through commitment and consent, but not the latter two steps. Matthew nor the other Gospels give us any of the inside details of how Joseph received the news that Mary was with child or how he processed this but we can read between the lines somewhat.

He is broken hearted to hear the news that Mary is with child. He has a problem that he needs to take care of. He is a man, a good man, a righteous man, a compassionate man and a man that cares. He has to act upon this and he has two choices. One would be to do a public statement and the other is a private divorce in the presence of two witnesses and the latter is what he chooses in the way of graciousness and compassion. I am probably reading into by saying he is so overwhelmed here that he just collapses into sleep. It is when he falls asleep that the angel visits him in a dream and communicates to him, just as his name sake Joseph had received a message in a dream (the Old Testament Joseph known as the dreamer).

This Joseph, one of the tribe of Judah, a son of David, who was of the seed of Abraham now receives a message that says ‘don’t fear, Mary is faithful for she is now still without intimacy and what she has is a miraculous gift from the Spirit of God. The Messiah has come. The Word has become flesh to dwell among us.’ As the second stanza of the hymn *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* says;

*Christ by highest heav'n adored
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come
Offspring of a Virgin's womb
**Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity**
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel
Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

Matthew has given answered two questions for us – who is this in that manger and why is this? Who is Emmanuel meaning God with us and the answer to why is God has come to save His people from their sins. There is the answer to all the issues of the age. You can search for them politically, economically, recreationally, and anywhere and everywhere and it will never be sustaining. The answer to the cry of our heart which is how can a man or woman be right with God, is God’s answer which is that God has come to us to be with us to be one of us to save us from the power of our sins, from the eternal judgment of our sins, from the destruction of our sins, and one day from the presence of our sins.

I love to speak of my Savior and I am overwhelmed to have the privilege to do it Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day in the life of this congregation and then in special opportunities like this. I never want any of them to be overlooked or missed because what is at stake here is not simply you having a good meal on Christmas Day, but is have you received the indescribable, unmerited, undeserved gift from God, His Son Jesus? He was given for the sons of earth and that we might have a second birth with life eternal.

One Puritan preacher once said, “I can look into the skies and the heavens and see the majesty of God by the light of creation. I can see God in His glory above us. I can look at the law of God, knowing I’m a sinner, and I see God against us. Then I look to the manger and see the glorious truth of all eternity – God for us, God with us, God one of us. God has come to save us.”

If you believe that then you must tell the world that Christ has come to save His people from their sins. If you have not yet believed that then I invite you from the precarious position of being under the judgment of God to the assured position of everlasting life by putting your trust in Jesus Christ the Son of God who came to us to be one of us, for us, to save us and if God be for us then who can be against us? Let's pray.

Prayer:

In the quietness of this hour if you have never made that commitment to Christ then I invite you to Him even now. It is the glorious truth that He can be yours and you can be His. There is no ritual you have to go through. You simply come to Him for that's why He came for you – to open the way for He is the Way. All you have to do is say 'Jesus, I know I am a sinner and I turn from my sins, my treason against You and now I give my heart, life and soul to You who came to die for me.' In the shadow of all of that wood in the stable was 33 years later a wooden cross where He would bear your sins. Would you come and put your trust in Him now? For those of you who know Christ, I tell you that Gospel of Matthew opens this way; Emmanuel, God with us. As you deal with the Lord now, Matthew ends his book this way; Lo, I will be with you always to the end of the age.' Thank You Jesus, for I pray this in Your Name, Amen.