

“What’s In a Name?”
Matthew 1:18–25
Pastor Bruce Stallings
December 24, 2019 • 11:00 p.m. Sermon

As I was thinking about and preparing for this study I decided to go through some of the names used for the Son of God in the nativity. Names are important. My father, Albert Ray Stallings and my mother, Joanne Stallings, named me and my siblings as their children. Perhaps you have gone through that process of trying to find the perfect name for your child or animal. I think people waste time coming up with names for their cat but generally people have little to no evidence of what their child or animal will become in the future so people tend to grow up into their name. It’s interesting how that name tends to capture them.

As my parents named their children I have a sister named Martha Jo after my mother Joanne. I have a sister named Nancy Anne after my mother Joanne. I have a brother named Andrew Ray after my dad Albert Ray and my name is James Bruce. Now I’m over that for that bothered me for about 53 years but I got over it last year that I never got one of my parent’s names. I asked my dad about it and he said “Did you want to be ‘Albert Bruce’? Your mom didn’t like Albert Bruce and I wanted to name you Blaze.” I chose not to do that. I asked my dad if he got the name James from the Bible but he said he didn’t so I asked him ‘then why James’ and he said ‘it went with Bruce.’

When Sonya Dawn and I got married the Lord blessed us with children. Sonya means wisdom and Dawn means daybreak. She is absolutely that ray of sunshine that bright daybreak each and every day and pretty much in every situation except for few when I really get on her nerves. We wanted to give our kids a name that had meaning and have a heritage with. My dad didn’t know what Bruce meant so I went and looked it up and it means ‘thick brush’ so I’ve been trying to live up to that name for quite some time. My dad would say now it means ‘someone hard to deal with.’ But when we had our first child we named him Jacob Enoch. What a name!

Jacob is the father of 12 sons in the Bible, the father of the tribes of Israel. Enoch pleased God and then he was no more. God was so pleased with him that Enoch didn’t even experience death. Then came Mary Katherine, our first born daughter. Mary was named after the Mary that sat at the feet of Jesus. Katherine came from a woman who discipled my wife Sonya who also went by Kit which is what we called my daughter. Then came our next son James Benjamin who was named after the James in the Bible and not after me. James in the Bible was the brother of Jesus, a leader in the New Testament church and that was part of our prayer for him and Benjamin meant ‘son of the right hand.’ Our fourth child was born and we named her Mary Elizabeth. She was named after a different Mary which was Mary the mother of Jesus and her cousin Elizabeth who was the mother of John the Baptist.

With all those names comes prayers that we have prayed. My son Jake (Jacob) is engaged and I’m not sure we have shared with him that we expect him and his wife to be to have 12 sons. We pray these names into their life and what the Lord would do in and through their names that have been given.

In Matthew 1 we’ll see these two interesting and unique names that the Son of God is called. Matthew 1:18–25 says *[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [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.

Matthew gives a general statement that Mary was found with child and to find how that story unfolded you have to go to the Gospel of Luke, but you find that the angel answers that critical question in Joseph's mind about Mary being with child. He had only known the practical way of conceiving a child and wouldn't have known the supernatural. He would have never guessed an angel visited Mary to tell her that the Holy Spirit was going to conceive in her a Child so that was explained to Joseph by an angel. So the angel tells him he would not need to divorce her and Joseph is even told what he is to name the Child which is Jesus. An angel also told Mary the same name as to what the Child would be called. The angel also quotes from the Isaiah 7:14 passage in which Joseph is also to give the Child the name Immanuel – God with us. What an incredibly beautiful name and an even better concept.

The concept that is being declared here is Holy God with sinful man. The name Immanuel is that God is residing among man and that is a huge declaration. It is not the first time it has happened. God has walked/resided among man in different ways. The first time we read about it is in the book of Genesis. This would be after sin has come into the world. Genesis 3:8 says *[8] And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.* I would say that this probably had been happening regularly and God was communing with Adam and Eve where they knew the sound of the Lord walking. They had fellowship with Him and the concept of Immanuel at that time would have been God with man without sin. That's the ideal scenario, but then Adam and Eve ushers sin into the world.

Then we see this unbelievable gracious thing that takes place and it's easy to read right over it. All of a sudden after Adam and Eve have sinned, but before they have interacted with God and we know that God knows all things, God still came down. He came back down in the cool of the day to deal with man. God did not shun man or say He wouldn't have anything to do with them anymore. God comes down yet again and He begins the process of walking these two individuals (Adam and Eve) through repentance of their sin, but also of the process of redeeming mankind from sin. That process began when God came down with Adam and Eve – God with us.

Throughout the Old Testament there are different occasions where God would come down and God would be with man. We call those theophanies – opportunities where God would reveal Himself. One of those times was when God came down to speak with Moses through the burning bush. There was a time God spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai and the mountain shakes and thunders when God comes by and Moses is not allowed to see God face to face because He tells him he would be consumed if he did, but God passed by Moses as Moses was told to be in the cleft of the rock. Those are very unique circumstances.

What is being declared to Joseph by the angel is that God is coming down as God in the form of a Man. So here He is going to do more than just come down and appear. He will come

down as a Baby, grow up as a Boy and He will do all the things that man does except without sin. That was part of His declaration and that is very important. Paul gives us an explanation of this in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:5–8 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.* Jesus did not let go of being God when He came to earth.

As I think of this time of year and taking the Lord's Supper I think of what Luke says about Mary after the birth of Jesus in Luke 2:19; [19] *But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.* This is what I think captures what we would do at an 11pm Christmas Eve communion service. I want to get you to ponder a perspective about this concept of Immanuel – God with us who is fully God and fully Man.

God could have sent Jesus to come and be with us as a 30 year old man. He did it before when He sent Jesus to Joshua in the Old Testament on the plains of Jericho. This experience is known as a Christofany which is Christ being revealed. How do we know it was Christ? This account takes place in Joshua 5:13–15 which says [13] *When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" [14] And he said, "No; but **I am the commander of the army of the LORD.** Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" [15] And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.* There is only one army of the Lord and one Commander of that army.

So Jesus came down in the form of man who Joshua thought was a soldier. Joshua interacted with Him very briefly and when Joshua realizes who he is interacting with, he worships Him. God didn't send Jesus as a 30 year old man to earth to spend a few years in ministry and then die on the cross but He sent Him as a Baby. There are many reasons why God would send Jesus to earth as a Baby but clearly one of them was so that Jesus would be fully man and so He would be sent as a Baby to grow and be known as a Man. Jesus came to fulfill all the prophecies in His Word by doing this and the world would see Him as a Man. With the influence of the Holy Spirit people would see Him as what He claimed to as truly the Son of God.

The catechism questions help us with this. Question 21 says;

Q: Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

A: The only Redeemer of God's elect, is the Lord Jesus Christ,¹ who, being the eternal Son of God, became man,² and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.³ (1. 1 Timothy 2:5. 2. John 1:1, 14, John 10:30, Philippians 2:6, Galatians 4:4.

3. Philippians 2:5–11.) Jesus was fully God and fully man.

We read from Scripture that mankind was blessed by Immanuel, God with us. Stop and think about what it would have been like to live during the days of Jesus being a Man on earth. God with us literally meant God among you so you could have listened to His teaching. You could have been one of those that witnessed and ate when Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000 with two fish and five loaves of bread. Do you think you would ever be the same again if you had? What if you had been healed from a lifelong issue by Him? Your life would never be the same.

We know from the Bible crowds would follow Him and picture yourself amongst them. Picture yourself hearing His teachings and you would say ‘Wow, Immanuel, God with us.’

After 400 years of silence we not only get a Word from God but we get the Lord Himself. I am learning from Him, watching Him do miraculous things and have literally seen Him change people’s lives. I can imagine if this were you that you would have some point said to someone else ‘I will never be the same’ having met Jesus, having experienced Jesus or maybe even having been healed by Jesus.

Now consider this; not all those people who encountered Him were saved. After reading the account of the feeding of the 5,000 we are not told that all 5,000 surrendered their life to the Lord. Think about the masses that followed Him from town to town which means they gave up their jobs or livelihood to follow Him from town to town and every once in a while in Scripture we hear that Jesus said a hard saying and then it would say many had deserted Him. One of those passages is in John 6. They experienced Immanuel, God with us, but they never surrendered their life to the Lord. From what I have studied in the Scripture I believe that everyone who had been healed by Him were not all saved by Him. Some were but some were not and some were even ungrateful yet they experienced the Lord and their life would never be the same again but their eternity had not been changed.

We can embrace Immanuel, God with us, and still miss Jesus. We can embrace that God would send His Son, walk among us, be around His teaching and all to the point we would even change how we live our life and yet not know Jesus. The name Immanuel in my opinion leads you to the name Jesus. The name Immanuel, God with us, really requires you to define that word ‘with’ for we know God is holy and we are sinners but what is the definition of the word ‘with’? Is it simply left to God ‘among’?

The sad reality is there are many, possibly most people that celebrate Christmas that do not know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. They have never surrendered their life to Him. They do acknowledge God as the God and Jesus as the Son of God. They do believe God came down and was with us. They believe He lived a perfect life and died on the cross. They don’t try to disprove any of that factually and they will celebrate Christmas, Immanuel, God with us, but their heart is not with the Lord. They have never completely surrendered their life to the Lord and so they do what Scripture says is a caution – do not deceive yourself (I Corinthians 3:18–21, James 1:22).

As Christians we are not to judge them for we would be like them if it were not for the grace of God who brought us to the end of ourselves. We are to pray for them for they might be family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers and you might be eating lunch or dinner with them tomorrow. You might be giving and receiving gifts with them. You so desperately want them to know that God was simply with us but that God is for us and that God is in us. So we not only embrace Immanuel but Jesus yet do not hear me diminish the name Immanuel when I say that. It is an incredible grace-filled declaration to say God with us but it has to be that we have come to the point we have surrendered our life to the Lord.

How is your celebration of Christmas? Is it all that celebration of God with us and all that comes with that understanding and declaring ‘I believe God to be God, Jesus to be the Son of God and that He was born of a virgin and what He did’ but has it gone to the point where you surrender your life to Him? Have you confessed you are a sinner, your sins, not simply the virgin birth and that He is the Son of God, but also embraced His death and resurrection? When we come to Communion it is Jesus who invites you to come to the Table because of the sacrifice

He has done to live that perfect life, to take on sin, and to pay for the penalty of sin for the entire world.

I hope and trust that you today have embraced Immanuel, God with us, so that when you define 'with' it includes Him being Jesus in your life. When you define what it means for God to be with you, it's for you to be known by Him and have a personal relationship with Him. If you have never done that I would invite you call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 and ask us how you can surrender your life to the Lord. We would be happy to introduce you to that personal relationship with Jesus. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I thank You so much that You loved us so much that You sent Your Son, Immanuel – God with us, You with us – Holy God with sinful man. Lord, thank You for initiating that relationship but we don't want to be those who have our lives impacted and influenced by that Reality, but we want to be those who as the Holy Spirit conceived in Mary's womb Jesus Himself, the Holy Spirit would conceive in us a new heart and would allow us to surrender our stubborn heart wrapped up in all the things of this world that we might bow down and embrace Jesus Christ who has come to save us from our sins. I pray that Your Spirit would do that work in us and through us. Then Lord, allow us to be good, faithful heralds like the shepherds who could not stop sharing with others not just the story of Christmas but the story of how You have saved us personally as sinners from our sins. O Lord we thank You for Jesus for it is in His Name I pray, Amen.