

ISAIAH 7:10-16; Matthew 1:18-25

NAME HIM EMMANUEL - PATHWAY TO HOPE

We walk our final Advent prophetic pathway today - the pathway to hope.

As we do we're confronted with a strange word: Emmanuel
It's a name that comes up in both of today's readings.

Firstly, by the prophet ISAIAH as he speaks to King Ahaz of Judah,
... The Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.

Secondly, by an angel appearing in a dream to Joseph,
Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us'

Emmanuel. Not your average name. We don't even use it very often in church circles, do we? we tend not to use it ... except for around Christmas time ...

Have you accepted Emmanuel as your Lord and Saviour?

We pray this in Emmanuel's name.

I've given my heart to Emmanuel?

Mmmm. Seems a bit strange, doesn't it?!

We talk about following the teachings of Christ, but Emmanuel?

Emmanuel though *is* an important title for Jesus, according to the Gospel of Matthew and as originally quoted from the prophet ISAIAH.

You see, Emmanuel is something of a codeword for Christians ... a bit like an insider's bit of lingo. It tends to crop up in poetry, in hymns, even some churches and Christian communities I know of.

Only Christians 'in the know' use Emmanuel with any frequency. How long is it since - apart from hymns and Bible readings perhaps - did that word 'Emmanuel' spring forth from your lips?

Somehow we're much more comfortable saying the likes of:

Have you accepted Christ as your Lord and Saviour?

We pray this in Christ's name.

I've given my heart to Jesus Christ?

The confusion - the uncertainty - perhaps has its origins in the pages of scripture itself.

In chapter one of Matthew the angel Gabriel visits Mary with the news that she will bear a child. She's to name him 'Jesus'. Then Matthew takes this prophecy from ISAIAH 7 and uses it as the foundation of this holy event. He quotes from the section which in the original Hebrew Old Testament a 'young woman' will bear a child and name him 'Emmanuel'.

You see, in just a matter of verses, this child is given two names. It's like if my parents firstly named me 'David' and then forgetting they'd done that, somehow named me 'Fred'! What a recipe for schizophrenia *that* would be!

You'd think that Matthew would have bypassed the 'Emmanuel' factor. But he doesn't. Matthew's community know their Old Testament! Names are important. In some cultures *really* important.

We use the name 'Jesus'. In fact, as many of you will be aware, it's the Latin form of the Aramaic name, 'Yeshua' ... Joshua.

It means "God saves". In fact any child around the world carrying that name 'Joshua' ... and I know a few myself, is wittingly or not, sharing something special ... those amazing words of hope ... God saves.

Joshua - it's also the name of the one who takes over from Moses and leads God's people into the promised land.

There you have it ... Joshua ... Jesus. Jesus ... Joshua.

In a very real sense Jesus shares the name of the one who "finishes the task of bringing God's people from slavery and death in Egypt into the Promised Life God had in store for them. Think about that for a minute. See some parallels there?

And what does 'Emmanuel' mean? Yes - God with us. In Isaiah 7, it's the name for the sign given to embattled King Ahaz; a sign that everything was going to be OK, though it sure didn't look like it at the time.

Our Isaiah 7 reading is a story of fear and trust. King Ahaz is called to be a man of courage and, but he fails, and his lack of trust in God leads to dire consequences for his people. Signs are offered him to read, but he misses them.

What's God's message to Ahaz? Fear not. I am with you.

Fear not, I am with you. It's the most frequent message from God throughout scripture. Whether it's OT or NT.

As we read Matthew's account of the Incarnation of Jesus, we sense Matthew setting up this event we celebrate, we sing about, we rejoice in each Christmas. It is an event, says Rick Morley "which collects all the holy hopes and dreams that God's people ever had". We sing at Christmas in that beloved carol, "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight".

As I said, Matthew manages in his retelling to set up this Incarnation event. "InCarnation" meaning "in flesh" or "became flesh".

And the Word became flesh and lived among us (moved into our neighborhood as Peterson so brilliantly paraphrases it in *The Message*), and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)

In Matthew's pre-Christmas reading, Christ is not simply given two names. He's given two names that embody the promises that God makes with his people.

A promise that says to you, to me, to all humankind: Do not fear. God is with us. In Christ, God is bringing **us** from slavery & death into a Kingdom of life and freedom.

And if that is not something to give us hope ... to put a spring into our step ... a joy in our hearts ... I don't know what us.

At Christmas, we celebrate Emmanuel - that God comes among us; that God is with us. We celebrate Jesus ... that God saves. We celebrate Christ ... the anointed one ... the Messiah.

And with hope in our hearts, we sing,

Rejoice, rejoice,

Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

Open your hearts to Emmanuel, the Christ, Jesus today.
Prince of Peace, Lord of Lords, Hope of the world.
Amen.

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